

# SOULFUL TRUTH TELLING

AM I IN THE  
WRONG MARRIAGE?

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LOVE COACH



# **Soulful Truth Telling:**

**Am I In the Wrong Marriage?**

by Sharon Pope

Master Life Coach & Seven-Time Best-Selling Author

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# Dedication

For My Beautifully Brave Clients

*You inspire me.*

*You touch my heart and feed my soul.*

*You are the reason I do what I do.*

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**Section I:**

*Answering the Question*

# Chapter 1: When I Faced the Question

*“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”*

*~ Anaïs Nin*

There are some things we don't discuss. There are some topics that are off-limits. There are some questions that go unanswered.

But that doesn't mean they don't exist. That doesn't mean the quiet whispers don't become louder over time. That doesn't mean that these questions don't seep into our soul and leave us feeling alone.

One of the most difficult questions that people face in their lives is, *Am I in the wrong marriage?*

## **How do I know this?**

I know this because it was a question that I came face-to-face with years ago.

I know this because women (and even a few brave men) reach out to me from different corners of the world looking for clarity in their own lives and in their most important relationship.

I know this because it also happens to be one of the most searched questions on Google and the reason that happens is because a lot of people are seeking answers to a question that they can't ask their families, their friends or their partners. If you are asking that question yourself, know that you are not alone.

## **The Good Enough Marriage**

I was in a marriage with a nice, handsome, good man. He was responsible, took care of the finances, and made sure our yard looked nice. He worked out four days a week religiously,

ironed his clothes for the week every Sunday evening and packed his lunch for work each night before going to bed. He was kind and honest and I knew he would never hurt me.

Our relationship was low-drama, but also low-connection, low-intimacy, and low-affection. It was *good enough*.

We had the beautiful four-bedroom home in a suburban golf community. We had nice cars, we took vacations, we had plenty of friends, and we had supportive families. We had everything we were supposed to have, so why wasn't I happy?

At that time in my life, I was incredibly focused on climbing the ladder in my soul-sucking corporate marketing career, because I thought that maybe the next job, the next promotion, or the next big project would take away the emptiness.

I wanted everyone to believe that I had the world by the tail and that everything in my life was picture-perfect. Clearly, it was not.

Around the seventh year of our marriage, I began to change. My needs began to change, slowly, over time and then seemingly all at once.

I would notice other couples and how affectionate they were and how connected they appeared to be and I wanted that for myself. I began to ask my husband for affection, but honestly he didn't know how to give it and I didn't know how to receive it. So it was just awkward. For several years I was able to convince myself that he had enough other good qualities and I should just live without affection, deep connection, and intimacy in my life. And that worked for a while. Until it didn't.

After 11 years, my marriage ended.

## **No Simple Answers**

There wasn't a simple answer to the most difficult question in my life. And there was no way to answer that question without either denying my needs or hurting my husband. There was no answer that friends and family could understand, much less approve of.

But that's how it is with the most important questions of our lives, isn't it?

These questions demand attention.

These questions keep whispering to us, over time getting louder and louder.

They want an answer. They want clarity. They want to know what's next.

I didn't have anyone at that time who could help me navigate this terrain. How could I ask friends or family about this when all I had ever done was wear my daily mask of perfection? I had never allowed myself to be vulnerable, not even with those closest to me. That emotional distance I created was like an enormous brick wall I built around myself that no one could scale; not my friends, not my family and not my husband. I didn't hire a therapist or a coach, because I judged myself, thinking that needing to ask for help was somehow a sign of weakness.

So I sought my answers alone and it took much longer than it needed to. It was more painful and confusing than it probably needed to be. I didn't do it all correctly or properly or gracefully. But I did answer the question for myself. I did get the clarity I needed (eventually). I did find the deep soulful love of my life. And I did release my first husband to find someone who could love him the way he needed to be loved, to love him in a way that I could not.

### **Why I Hate This Question**

Let's talk about this question: *Am I in the wrong marriage?*

I asked this question myself when I was struggling in my marriage, but in hindsight, I hate this question. I hate it because it contains an untruth. My marriage to my first husband was not the "wrong marriage" for me.

That relationship and that experience helped make me into the woman I am today.

I wouldn't be able to love the way I do today were it not for that marriage.

I wouldn't have ever found what my heart longs for had I not had the contrasting experience of a relationship that never quite fit.

I certainly wouldn't be coaching women through their most difficult relationships if I was still wearing the mask of perfection.

That marriage wasn't *wrong*. It just wasn't forever.

I have such love and admiration for the perfection of the journey that I don't actually think there's such a thing as a wrong marriage. Rather, I choose to see everyone who enters our lives as divine teachers, there to present the lesson that our souls most need to learn at that time.

### **Your Answers...Your Life**

The answer to the question I asked myself in my first marriage ultimately led to our separation and the dissolution of the marriage. But that was my answer, for my life.

We each get to create our own experiences in this life, so the answer for my life and my marriage may or may not be the same as your answer for your life and your marriage. There is no wrong answer, except not answering.

I want you to know that you're not alone. Many of my clients are experiencing what you're experiencing. I share my story and the experiences of my clients through this book in order to help you gain clarity for your relationship. To protect the privacy of my clients, I always change the names and any identifying details of their stories.

As a truth-telling Love Coach, I never tell my clients what to do. For one thing, it doesn't work; but for another, the way *you* would live your life might be very different than the way *I* would live *your* life. So, I will not tell you what to do. I will guide you to *your* answer for *your* life, for *your* heart and for *your* marriage.

## **Soulful Truth Telling**

The core of my teaching, speaking, and coaching is based on what I refer to as *Soulful Truth Telling*. Without the truth, there's nowhere to go, and there's nothing to work with. You cannot thrive in a bed of lies, and you cannot gain real clarity while swimming in half-truths.

But truth can be a little bit like taking medicine. We say we want to feel better, but we don't want to have to taste that nasty pill. In order to get to the truth in a way that doesn't feel like a bitter pill, Soulful Truth Telling moves slowly, methodically, gently, allowing truth to bubble to the surface.

Soulful Truth Telling is more like wiggling a tooth loose than open-heart surgery.

Rather than highlighting all of our mistakes, with Soulful Truth Telling we simply become *compassionately curious* about how we reached this place, how we helped create our experiences within our marriages, and what those experiences are here to teach us.

Rather than blaming and focusing on our partner's shortcomings, with Soulful Truth Telling, we gently open ourselves up to forgiveness and a deeper truth.

Within the context of Soulful Truth Telling, you will gain the insight you need to trust your answers for your life and to know what to do next. Once you learn these truths, you can't un-learn them. You can't go back to the way it was before. You can't continue repeating the

same destructive patterns or painful experiences, because you know something you didn't know before. Regardless of your decision about your marriage, you will move forward.

Soulful Truth Telling is your doorway to clarity.

Soulful Truth Telling is your key to healing and forgiveness.

Soulful Truth Telling is your path to discovering what comes next.

# Chapter 2: What Leads Us to the Question

*“It is only when we stop and step out of our lives...and find out how happy we really are. It’s only when we walk back from the canvas that we can see the larger picture.”*

~ Pico Iyer, 2015 speech at USC

Sandy and her husband David loved their three children dearly, but being a parent is the most selfless act there is and with three kids it seemed like life never seemed to slow down for them. Sandy and David used to dream together about how easy life would be once the kids were grown and out on their own, leaving the two of them the freedom to cultivate their interests, to travel more, or to simply enjoy an occasional afternoon of peace and quiet. Their vision for that dream included a home that had been paid off, scaling back at work, and spending weekends with grandbabies.

But those talks about their shared dream seem so long ago now.

Sandy and David are sleeping in separate bedrooms, sharing no real affection or emotional connection. They communicate mostly about the necessities, about what’s needed to keep the kids active, the bills paid, and dinner on the table.

Occasionally, David complains that they’re not having sex very often, but he has also learned that bringing that up usually leads to an argument. Sandy feels increasingly alone as the distance between her and David grows wider and deeper. He wants affection, but is unable to make himself vulnerable and emotionally connect with her. She can’t give affection without feeling deeply emotionally connected. It has become a never-ending cycle of pain and loneliness, anger and disconnection. Neither of them is getting what they need in the relationship and neither feels able to meet the needs of their partner.

## **The Bullshit We Believed**

When Sandy and David started out in their marriage they did what most of us did. They established themselves in their careers, they bought a home, and then within a few years began

having children. Their lives centered around their jobs, taking care of the kids, and taking care of the home. Their free time was spent with neighbors who cultivated their own version of the “white picket dream”—everyone leading the same suburban existence and no one ever letting on that there’s something missing in their lives. It’s like a pact that if we stick together, we can collectively convince ourselves that this life we have created is enough.

As their kids grew older, they signed them up for multiple sports and other classes. The kids wanted to play football, soccer, and run track, while Sandy wanted them to know how to play the piano and participate in church activities with other kids. She became the shuttle driver, in addition to the corporate executive, the good wife, the perfect mother, and the house manager. She made sure the kids’ clothes were washed, their favorite snacks were in the cabinet, and their homework was completed before bed.

In the meantime, her marriage was on auto-pilot. And tending to that just seemed like one more thing that never quite made it to the top of her list.

As the children grew older and became increasingly independent, Sandy had time to focus more on her career. She began to excel at work, receiving promotions and discovering a new joy for her work that she hadn’t been able to appreciate previously. With that success came longer hours at the office and more confidence in herself. With that increased level of confidence came a new sense of self. With that comfort in her own skin came attention from men. Something was shifting in her, but David didn’t notice.

David was fine with *fine*. He was fine with a marriage that wasn’t overflowing with passion, because they had a family together. He was fine with working hard and staying late at the office, because taking care of the family financially was his way of showing love. David was fine with not talking as much and with having sex less and less, because he knew how tired both he and Sandy were at the end of most days. He loved his wife. He loved his family. He liked his job and he didn’t really have desires for more. He was fine with *fine*.

### **From Busyness to Emptiness to Loneliness**

Sandy would run all day long and essentially collapse at night into bed. She would often awake in the middle of the night with a sense of dread about what was missing in her marriage and in her life. She found herself sometimes even thinking about other men, but quickly pushed those thoughts from her mind. She would watch her husband in the middle of the night on the opposite side of the bed—not knowing how lonely Sandy felt—and sleeping like a baby.

Sandy began asking David for more: more attention, more connection, more intimacy. He would make an effort for a few weeks, but then would always go back to his way of loving from afar. She began sharing her feelings of emptiness with her husband, but not really addressing it directly. She would make suggestions that they take a vacation, but he was too busy at work. She suggested downsizing so that she could start her own business doing something she could be really passionate about, but he liked where they lived and all the kids' friends were in this neighborhood. She wanted to go to couples counseling, but he didn't. She tried to connect with David physically, but it always left her unfulfilled.

Because of a lack of consistent sleep, Sandy began not taking care of herself as she normally did and she got a bad sinus infection. That sickness left her tossing and turning, so David opted to sleep in the spare bedroom. The sinus infection hung on for almost three weeks, but the sleeping arrangements hung on for more than three years. They both used the need for a restful night's sleep as their excuse for why sleeping in separate bedroom simply made sense.

Now with her children almost all graduated from high school, she vaguely recalls those conversations about how good life would be once she and David were empty-nesters. Now, when she looks at her husband, she sees a kind and gentle stranger. He's a good person, but she's no longer drawn to him. She has love for him, but she's no longer in love with him. And the question that keeps her feeling stuck and alone is, *Am I in the wrong marriage?*

## **Slowly, Over Time**

I remember being on vacation one time with a big group of friends where we rented a house on the water and went boating on the lake. I'd brought along a floating lounger so I could get some sun but still feel the coolness from the water. It was a hot day and we were out enjoying an afternoon on the boat. When they stopped the boat so that people could swim, I slowly eased myself in the water and as gracefully as I could hoisted myself up onto the floating lounger. I laid my head back and soaked up the sun.

My friends call me *the lizard* because I like really warm weather and can stay out in it far longer than I should. I'm not sure how long I was out there on the lake, maybe 30 to 45 minutes, likely falling in and out of a light sleep. I was startled awake when I heard my name yelled from what sounded like pretty far away. I looked up and saw that I had floated almost all the way to shore, allowing the water to take me away, without having noticed.

I think it's the same with our relationships sometimes.

We don't fall asleep one night in wedded bliss and then wake up the next day with an emptiness and loneliness we can't explain. *Felling alone happens slowly over time.*

We get distracted by life. We put the marriage on auto-pilot and pour everything we have into our kids and our careers. We drift apart slowly, gently, and sometimes without resistance. It wasn't deliberate or intentional. No one gets married so that they can feel alone and disconnected years later. But when we're startled awake, we suddenly realize how far away we really are from where we once were.

## Reflective Questions:

- If I had to put my finger on what's missing or what's making me question my marriage, what is it?
- When was the last time my marriage felt right? What has transpired in our lives between that time and right now?

# Chapter 3: What Gets in Our Way or Keeps Us Stuck?

*“Any action is often better than no action, especially if you have been stuck in an unhappy situation for a long time. If it is a mistake, at least you learn something, in which case, it’s no longer a mistake. If you remain stuck, you learn nothing.”*

~ Eckhart Tolle

As a Love Coach, I speak to women every day who are in crisis in their marriage. The word they use to describe their feelings more than any other word is *stuck*. They are simultaneously both desperate to do something to escape the loneliness, and scared to death about what lies before them if they do. They don’t know how to be in their existing relationship and they don’t know how to leave.

Most of what keeps us stuck are beliefs we’ve created over time—thoughts we’ve come to believe as truth that may or may not actually be true. Let’s look at some of them.

## **I’m Staying for the Kids**

Joanne called me in tears; her pain was palpable. She’s been in an unhappy marriage for twelve years. There was love there at one time, but that was so long ago she couldn’t remember what that feeling of love felt like. She felt unseen, unheard and undervalued. They used to fight daily, but after years of arguments, she just lets him win because it’s simply easier that way. She gave up, struggled with depression and often cried herself to sleep at night. The relationship now felt more like they were roommates, on the good days, and adversaries on the worse days.

She didn’t know how to stay in that relationship and she didn’t know how to go either. She had convinced herself she could stay until the kids graduated high school, so they wouldn’t be impacted by a separation and divorce.

But she’s not sure she can keep that promise to herself.

She cannot keep living, simply existing, like this any longer. She cannot be the caged bird that denies her own wings. Joanne has put her life, her love, her joy on hold in the hope that doing so might somehow benefit her children. But now she's not so sure.

We all come by our beliefs and expectations about love and relationships honestly: we learn the most through the example set by our parents and within our families.

Joanne grew up with parents who were disconnected from each other for decades. They never spoke to one another lovingly in front of their kids and seemed to carry on their own separate and unhappy lives under the same roof and within the same four walls. It's natural that theirs was the kind of marriage Joanne walked into; it was the only lens through which she saw relationships until she started to feel the uneasiness of it within her life.

Through our living example, we teach our children how to be a spouse or partner to another soul. We teach them what to expect or settle for in relationships.

Little girls who grow up seeing Daddy being emotionally abusive to Mommy will expect the same from the young men in her life.

Young boys seeing Mom yelling at Dad and trying to control him will find themselves later in life with controlling, bossy women who don't respect him.

We demonstrate to our children what ingredients go into a relationship and what *normal* looks like. The relationships our children enter into will likely look a lot like what they saw at home. So, that begs the questions: *What are our children learning about who and how to love from what they're seeing and experiencing at home? And is your relationship the kind you'd like to see your children in one day?*

I have a theory that when Mom and Dad are happy, the kids are generally happy. When Mom and Dad aren't happy, nobody's happy. We give our children everything we can, but sometimes giving them a happy mother and father doesn't make the list.

Our kids mirror our energy. When we're worried and anxious, they get worried and anxious. When we're at ease and playful, they're at ease and playful. When Mom and Dad (or Mom and Mom or Dad and Dad) are sad, constantly fighting, disengaged, or angry, no one in the home – including the children – is content and peaceful.

Contrary to popular opinion, leaving an unhappy marriage may not be the right answer for your kids, *but it's not always the wrong answer.*

If you make the incredibly difficult choice to leave an unhappy marriage, you can choose to see and explain this change to your children through a lens of *"Love always hurts and most*

*marriages don't last," or you can choose to teach your children that "Love is a critically important component to creating a happy, healthy life. It's so important that you want to do it intentionally and consciously. And even when love doesn't last forever, it always brings us gifts. For us, that took the form of you."*

If you're considering the incredibly difficult decision to leave a relationship and you worry that in doing so you will damage your children forever, be gentle with yourself. You're doing your best to teach them how to love and who to love. And should you choose to course-correct midway through your life, your children may just learn for themselves that it's never too late to create a life you love. Whichever way your decision goes, you may be giving your children the greatest lessons about love that they'll ever receive.

### **The Judgments of Others**

Each of us has well-intentioned family and friends who genuinely want to see us happy, who want to see us at ease, but many of them also want to be comfortable. When we admit that things aren't as picture-perfect as they appear, that makes some people uncomfortable (particularly those that have bought into the suburban pact). When we confide in others about our decision of whether to remain in or leave our marriages, that brings up their fears about their own relationships.

When there is a bucket full of captured crabs, inevitably one will attempt to climb out. As it does, the other crabs will pull it back down into the bucket. Misery loves company.

We all have free will. Therefore, we all get to create our own life experiences. The decisions we make and the opinions we carry are all reflections of each of our respective journeys. Your friends and family—although genuinely trying to be helpful—are telling you their stories. They're telling you their fears, their worries, the things that would influence their decision.

This is yours to do.

If you want a sounding board, a guide through the forest of feelings and emotions or someone who can help you see through your blind spots, hire a professional: a therapist, a coach (I'm right here...), a counselor, a minister or rabbi. Get the support you need from someone who can truly support you.

### **The Scarcity of Money**

A lot of women stay in loveless marriages and painful relationships because of their money fears. Anne stayed in an incredibly emotionally abusive marriage for 27 years and one of the reasons she stayed was that her husband convinced her she would get nothing if she left and would never be able to support herself. That, of course was a lie, but it kept Anne stuck for a long time.

One of my mentors, Martha Beck shared a story with me that I think you'll find helpful. She occasionally volunteered with a heroin-recovery group and became curious about how these people with no job and no means to support their habits stayed addicted to drugs for so long. She figured out—based on their drug usage rates and the cost of the drugs—that they were each spending approximately \$160,000 per year on heroin. They had no jobs, no homes, and yet they were able to get their hands on hundreds of thousands of dollars every year to support their habits.

If heroin addicts can figure out how to support their habits, you can figure out how to feed yourself and put a roof over your head. This fear of being financially destitute is not true. You've probably never been destitute in your life, so there's no reason to believe that will be the case now.

Our ego would have us believe those lies, but it will drive our decisions and keep us in pain if we allow it.

There is no scarcity of money. If one person has a lot, that doesn't mean you will automatically have less. Money is not a pie to be portioned out; it is an exchange of energy for something you want.

Years ago, there was no such thing as a Life Coach. It was creatively created in response to a need. No one would have guessed that an online app and independent drivers from a company named Uber would essentially demolish the cab industry. No one foresaw the struggle the hotel industry would have as a result of the Internet. Most just put their self-serve reservation system online, but now more and more people are easily renting condos or someone's spare room when they travel.

You have to trust that you have gifts and talents that the world values. You need to open up to all the possibilities that exist in front of you. And you have to trust that The Universe has your back, knows what you need and is rising up to support you. You just have to meet it halfway.

**Better than Being Alone**

My client who I'll refer to as Tammy was married to her husband for 8 years. It was not uncommon for him to literally go days without saying a word to her, as a punishment for leaving a mess in the kitchen sink or disagreeing with him. She was miserable and sad and lonely. Tammy stayed as long as she did because at that time, she felt that having someone, anyone by her side was better than being alone. What she didn't realize was that she was already alone.

If you're staying in the marriage in order to avoid facing the fear of being alone, there's never going to be any peace and there's rarely going to be clarity. You will always be looking for someone to fill that emptiness for you, rather than taking responsibility for your own company and your own happiness.

Spend some time falling in love with your own company. If you don't heal your aloneness, even if you leave this relationship, your next relationship will be just like this one: lonely. If you don't want to be with you, why would anyone else?

Staying in a relationship because of insecurity and fear of being alone is never the right answer. When the foundation of a relationship is built on sand, it will never sustain the structure of a connected, lasting love.

### **No Decision is a Decision**

When we're facing a life-altering decision, it's easy to see how we can become stuck, trapped and frozen in our steps. But understand that not making a decision, or deciding to remain in the status quo is, in fact, making a decision.

I live in Columbus, Ohio. I could hop in my car today and drive to Dallas, Texas, and most of that trip would be made in the dark. With the headlights in my car, I can probably see ten feet ahead at a time. But I can still drive through the night and make it to Dallas tomorrow.

You may feel that you have to be able to see Dallas before you're willing to even get in your car and go to the end of your block, but that's not possible. If you wait until you can see Dallas before you leave Columbus, you will never leave Columbus. You will stay stuck in that place forever.

You don't have to know what the end of the journey looks like. Whether you're staying in your marriage or lovingly releasing your marriage, there is no way to know exactly what life will look like one year from now, even one month from now.

All you have to know is the one next step you need to take, the one next step that will give you more information to bring you to clarity. The only thing you need to see and address is that which is directly in front of you. And if you do that, one small step at a time, you can make it all the way to Dallas.

At this point, don't allow the big question of *Am I in the wrong marriage?* to stop you from answering the smaller questions along your journey. Each step you take gives you more information and draws you closer to clarity, so no next step can ever be a mistake.

## Reflective Questions:

- What belief or beliefs have kept me stuck in the question so far?
- What fears come up when I ask myself, *Am I in the wrong marriage?* Am I willing to name my fears individually and place them off to the side for the moment? (You can have them back later. I promise.)
- What is a small next step that feels like only moving ten feet in front of me right now?

# Chapter 4: When There's Someone Else

*"Unless you love someone, nothing else makes sense."*

~ e.e.cummings

As my client that I told you about earlier, Sandy, grew more confident at work and more comfortable in her own skin, she attracted someone at the office who had recently separated from his wife.

The two became friends and as they got to know one another, their conversations became more personal. He shared what had happened in his marriage and why he was separated. Sandy began to realize all that she was missing in her marriage and to question why there wasn't more affection and connection in that relationship. She questioned why there weren't deep conversations with her husband about dreams and desires and why she sometimes felt so alone even though she had a partner by her side for the last decade.

After months of what Sandy has convinced herself is an innocent friendship, they go for a glass of wine and end up ordering a bottle. He makes it clear that he would like to move beyond friends and she knows she has developed feelings for him. They know it's wrong. They know it's risky. They know it's become undeniable.

## **Someone Else's Purpose**

If there has been or is someone else, I want you to be gentle with yourself and understand why they're in your life.

When we're in a numb and disconnected marriage, we're incredibly vulnerable. The person who comes into your life may be there as a teacher for you (as you are for them). He may be the polar opposite of everything you've ever known and will demonstrate to you all the things you desire most but do not have, particularly intimacy, connection, and passion.

I was in a common experience in my own lonely marriage that was ripe for the tragedy of infidelity. When passion, connection and intimacy arrived at my suburban doorstep, it hit me like a ton of bricks.

Michael was tall, broad shouldered, strong, and confident. He had money, an exciting career, a magnetic personality, was 9 years younger than me and a bit of a bad boy. I was drawn to Michael like a moth to a flame. I knew I was playing with fire. I believed it was wrong. I believed it was destructive ... and yet, I couldn't turn away from the heat that fire provided. Playing with fire has a predictable outcome and that relationship left me in ashes.

But I know why he came into my life: I needed to be broken wide open; I needed to feel; I needed to love with abandon. He gave me the precious gift of awakening desires within me that I never knew existed. But those desires were mine; they weren't dependent upon him. The person who awakens us is never as important as the awakening itself.

If you've become emotionally involved with someone else, it certainly makes clarity about your current marriage difficult. The dismount I did from my marriage was far from elegant, because I was running away from the pain and emptiness, the life I had created. When you've given a piece of your heart to someone outside of your marriage the best questions you can ask yourself to move towards clarity are:

Why is he/she here?

How did I attract this person into my life?

What are they here to teach me?

Is there a gift they've given me?

One of my clients, Ellen was in a long-term relationship that wasn't going anywhere. She knew that relationship was long past its expiration date, but she hadn't yet had the courage to move on. Then she met Terry. Terry was smart, successful, and charming. Ellen and Terry were friends first for many months, but when he asked her out on a date, it was time for Ellen to make a decision about her existing relationship. She decided that in order to move on, she needed to end things with her current partner.

Terry ended up being a complete narcissistic disaster, but he did serve a purpose. Terry provided Ellen a gift. His presence gave her the courage to end something that needed ending.

## **Women Cheat Too**

Over the decades, men have earned a deserved reputation as being the ones who cheat. After all, in the ancient world marriage used to just be a way for men to acquire more property, preserve their power, or produce legitimate heirs. (They, like us, come by their stuff pretty

naturally too.) But infidelity outside of a marriage is not reserved exclusively to men anymore; it occurs with women much more often than we're willing to admit.

There's a lot of shame associated with infidelity. As women, we simultaneously judge ourselves and justify the need. Without debating the specifics of when that line is crossed and it's considered *cheating*, when we share our hearts with someone outside of our marriage, it's time we looked deeper to see how we got here and what we're truly seeking. It's time we explore this through the eyes of compassion and love, rather than shame and judgment.

As a culture, we've never been more connected to each other and yet never more disconnected. We reach for our phones as we wake up more often than we reach for the person lying beside us. We check our email every 20 minutes, but we don't look our spouse in the eyes during dinner. We stay busy and distracted, moving through our days numb, empty, and detached.

If you've cheated, don't be surprised when the most judgmental voices inside your mind become louder. You will judge yourself. You will judge your partner for not being able to meet your needs. You may even judge the people who you think are judging you: *"They just don't understand what it's like to be in a passionless marriage."*

Those voices will tell you, *"You're a bad person," "Once a cheater, always a cheater",* and *"You don't deserve love."* These thoughts will keep you stuck in shame, if you let them.

As a Love Coach, I have countless examples of clients who have trusted me with their very personal stories where infidelity was involved and those clients are some of the most loving, kind, and resilient women I have had the privilege of knowing. I've been by their sides as they've done the difficult work of forgiveness (forgiving themselves and everyone else) and seen first-hand how they've been able to open their hearts again to committed, connected, and lasting love.

### **When You've Been Cheated On**

It's incredibly painful to be on the receiving end of a partner who has betrayed you through infidelity. Unfortunately for many, our first inclination is to turn it back on ourselves and look for where we fell short, what we didn't have or do or how we're somehow not enough. *If only I had lost some weight. Maybe I'm just too demanding. What does she have that I don't have?* Please know that your partner's cheating isn't really about you; it's about them—what they're seeking and the void they're attempting to fill.

I've been on both sides of infidelity. As a matter of fact, the reason I chose my first husband was because I knew he wouldn't cheat on me, lie to me, or hurt me. Ironically, Michael (the man who broke my heart) also cheated on me. Michael told me he loved me, but my best friend saw him out with another woman. And I knew that woman wasn't the only one.

No one deserves to feel that kind of pain, and I don't believe that anyone sets out to do it for the purpose of hurting someone else. They do it to blunt the edges of the sharp pain they're in. They do it to fill the void they feel. They do it to numb the emptiness in their heart. If there was no lack, there would be no need.

You can sit in the negative emotions of guilt, shame and disappointment. You can shift responsibility away from you and blame your partner. Neither is terribly productive. The more true way to understand how this happened is to acknowledge the lack in your beloved's heart; when you are able to understand that void, you open to the possibility of being able to recover from the betrayal.

Love is flexible and durable; it can withstand a lot. Trust, however, is much more fragile; it is built over time and can be destroyed in an instant. Therefore, the presence of someone else can be a polarizing contrast from which many never recover.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- Have I ever found myself attracted to someone outside of my marriage?
- If I assume that person is in my life as a teacher, what is the lesson I am being directed to learn?
- If I assume there's a gift embedded in that experience, what is it?

# Chapter 5: Have You Told the Truth?

*"All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them."*

~ Galileo Galilei

We have tens of thousands of thoughts each day and most of them aren't true. Just because a thought comes in your mind doesn't make it true. Our busy minds will send us fearful thoughts all day long and get away with it if we allow it.

*If I left my marriage, where would I live?*

*What if I can't afford this house anymore? Will we get foreclosed on?*

*Do I make enough money to support myself and my children?*

*Will I be able to get health insurance? How does all of that work? I don't even pay the bills or know how much money we have. What's my credit score?*

*What if I leave my marriage and I spend the rest of my life alone?*

*At my age, it's going to be really hard to find the kind of love that I want. After all, everyone is married or broken by this age.*

If we allow our thoughts too much free reign, we'll imagine ourselves living under a bridge, all alone, with no job, no income, no insurance, and a 550 credit score.

Even though, intellectually, we know that's not the truth, that doesn't mean the fear-based thoughts stop coming. They will come; there is no way to turn them off. And when the thoughts come often enough, they become deeply held beliefs that we carry around with us and that permeate our experience.

Our beliefs influence what we accept and perceive as love and loving behavior.

Our beliefs drive our urges to try to control or change others into being who we need them to be so we can feel better or more secure.

Our fearful beliefs keep us from making ourselves vulnerable to our partner. Though this is an attempt to keep us safe, it also keeps us from the *only* path there is to intimacy.

We can challenge those beliefs by becoming *compassionately curious* about how they're serving us or not serving us.

### **Amanda's Truth Found Her**

Amanda grew up in a small home in upstate New York with her mother, father and two older sisters. She can't remember ever seeing her mom and dad hold hands, kiss each other, or tell each other, "I love you." They were distant with each other, and Amanda remembers the feeling of sadness that surrounded her mother. It was like a cloud that followed her throughout her days.

Amanda is a grown woman now, in her own marriage with her own version of that cloud hovering each day. It has been there for as long as she can remember. She never thought it was unusual because that's what she had known as she was growing up—that's what she experienced as her parents' relationship. So she entered into her own dark marriage, had several children, and had far more sad days than happy ones. She didn't feel connected in her marriage or present for her children. She moved through her days lifeless and numb.

Amanda had the belief that that's how life and marriage are supposed to be. She never knew that was a lie. She never realized she had a choice or an alternative.

Her belief about marriage, about what love is supposed to feel like, about remaining in the pain, kept Amanda in a loveless marriage for nearly two decades. Once she was able to tell the truth about how she had gotten to this point, why she stayed as long as she did, and what her role was in the creation of her experience, she found a sense of joy and freedom in her life that she hadn't known was possible.

Over the next year, Amanda attempted to make her marriage work. But because she no longer believed the lies and was no longer willing to remain in an unhappy life, the marriage didn't last. She lost the marriage, but she also lost that hovering cloud.

### **Owning Our Roles**

When I was in my first marriage and facing the *Am I in the wrong marriage?* question myself, I had some soul searching to do. I began where it felt easy: by blaming my husband. I created a story in my mind that he couldn't love me the way I needed to be loved. I wanted something he couldn't give. There is some truth there, but that's not the full story.

I knew who he was when I met him. He was the one who was safe and secure. He was also reserved and structured. I ignored the fact that because there was very little spontaneity or passion, I could hide my heart and not get hurt. I made that trade-off. And I consciously forced the relationship. I remember driving alone in my car one day, after we had been together for about three months and I said out loud to myself, 'I'm going to make this one work.' And so I did. Until it didn't.

We had been dating for a year and he hadn't yet told me he loved me. Rather than seeing that as really valuable information, I gave him an ultimatum (like any woman with a plan would, I told myself). He acquiesced, told me he loved me, and I began creating our life together. We built a home, got engaged, and planned the wedding. We shopped at big box grocery chains, bought things we didn't really need, and I created projects and distractions to provide myself some amusement.

Eleven years later, he was still the same man I married; he hadn't changed, but I certainly had. If I wanted to, I could hold onto my story that he wasn't what I wanted anymore. But the truth was that I wasn't what I wanted anymore. I had become exhausted by putting on an act that my life was picture-perfect when it was far from it. I grew tired of pretending the life I had created was enough when it wasn't. I didn't like the numb, distant, perfectionist, living-on-ego-candy woman I had become.

I had to own my part in the creation of my experience. That took some time. But as soon as I did that, everything shifted.

I was able to forgive myself for abandoning my own heart in order to remain safe and secure in a small little cocoon when all along I knew I had wings.

I released resentments I had carried about my husband and found true joy and hopefulness for him. He has remarried and is with a good woman who loves him for exactly who he is, no changes necessary.

I moved on and was able to create a future love experience that looked dramatically different from my past experiences in love. Once I owned my role and saw how I had created that experience, I had the insight and ability to then create a different experience. I now have a deep, soulful, passionate, and lasting love with my amazing husband, Derrick (more about him later).

When we are brave enough to look truth in the eye, we have the opportunity for incredible clarity, as well as deep self-love and compassion during a difficult time. Sometimes the truth can feel a bit prickly. Let it feel prickly. Don't judge it or try to change it or run away

from it and hide. On the other side of that prickly truth is peace in your heart and the ability to create the kind of loving relationship you desire (whether with your partner or someone else in the future).

## **Reflective Questions:**

- Where and when did I abandon my heart? My needs? My desires?
- The truth is that I ...

# Chapter 6: What If Nothing Changes?

*“The only real security is not in owning or possessing, not in demanding or expecting, not in hoping, even. Security in a relationship lies neither in looking back to what it was, nor forward to what it might be, but living in the present and accepting it as it is now.”*

~ Anne Morrow Lindberg

When is the last time you got someone to do something they didn't want to do? How did that work out?

When was the last time someone tried to get you to do something you didn't want to do? How did that feel?

In making a decision about your marriage, you have to assume that your partner will not change. That's important to understand. They might change a bit, but if they do, they will do it for themselves, not because it's what you want them to do. So can you love him right where he is, as he is? If nothing changed, would you stay in the relationship?

The only person we can ever really change is ourselves (and on any given day, that's hard enough to do). What could you change about your perspective on the relationship that would make it so he didn't have to change? Is there a thought or belief you could release that could help you stay in the marriage *and* be happy?

Those are big questions. They're important questions.

## **When You Change Your Belief, You Can Change the Outcome**

I'm going to use an extreme example to make a point.

Let's say you and your husband have been really disconnected emotionally for many years, doing all you could to get through the repetitive days of chaos between work, home, and the kids. You haven't been intimate in months and you notice he's working later more often.

Your husband has an affair with another woman and you find out about it. You're hurt and feel like he's sharing the best parts of himself with someone else and leaving you with the

crumbs. You waver between feeling sad and feeling furious. But the one constant emotion you feel is confusion.

You confide in your friends and family and they tell you to leave your husband – now! “You don’t deserve that. What a jackass!” they say. But you’re frozen in fear about how leaving him would impact your life and your children’s lives. And there’s still a part of you that loves him.

As a society, we have come to believe that monogamy is right and good and moral and having an affair is wrong. But what if you genuinely still want to be in a monogamous relationship? And what if your husband realized he doesn’t want to only be with one woman for the rest of his life? Well, that’s valuable information, isn’t it?

What if you could get to a place of releasing the judgment associated with people who don’t want to only be with one person forever and ever? What if you could no longer see that as *wrong*?

What if your husband realizes that although he thought he could only be with one woman forever, he has since learned that he cannot?

You could spend years trying to change him. You could divorce him and make him out to be the bad guy to your children. You could harbor resentments and carry that hurt, anger, and baggage into your next relationship.

Or you could realize that this is some new and very important information. You both now want different things for your lives and those things happen to be on opposite ends of a spectrum. He’s just as allowed to create his own life experience as you are to create yours. It’s called free will, and no one is any more or less deserving of it.

The end result may look the same on the surface (the marriage may in fact end), but the energy behind it is a night and day difference.

He’s no longer a jack-ass, but rather someone who changed his mind.

And you don’t create a belief that all men cheat and aren’t to be trusted, so the energy and confidence you bring into your next relationship is open, loving, honest, and free from judgment.

Your kids still have two amazing parents who don’t put their children in the middle of their emotional relationship revision. They’re happy, healthy and well-adjusted kids who know that both of their parents love them.

That scenario may sound completely crazy to you. If it does, just understand that you're still carrying the belief that the only right way to live your life is with one person forever, because that's what you desire for yourself.

I intentionally used this example to bring to light how a shift in perspective and the releasing of a belief—things you actually have some control over—can completely transform an outcome.

### **Outgrowing Your Spouse**

When Kelly and Malcolm were married, they were both excelling in corporate America—he as a mechanical engineer and she in sales and marketing.

After the birth of their second child, Kelly decided to leave her job so she could take care of the children. Several years later, she was struggling. She was always so tired she could barely pull herself out of bed in the morning to get her kids off to school. She would sleep all day until it was time for the kids to get off the bus in the afternoon. She knew something was wrong, but her doctor kept telling her the lab results from her blood tests were fine. Her husband told her it was all in her head.

But she wasn't fine.

She became depressed. She put on weight. She was asleep more often than she was awake. She wasn't able to be present for her children and, at one point, her little boy said to her, "Mommy, you're not as fun as you used to be."

Kelly began furiously searching online for answers about what was happening to her. She found her way to an integrated-medicine health professional and learned that she had adrenal fatigue. Through a series of lifestyle changes (diet, exercise, etc), she pulled herself out of the grave and is living an incredibly full and active life again.

That experience changed Kelly's life. She wanted to share what she'd learned with others, because she knew she wasn't alone. She was accepted into a prestigious integrative health coaching program and began growing her practice.

Malcolm didn't approve. He assumed that Kelly felt better because she'd decided to feel better. "I knew it was all in your head," he told her.

Here's what Kelly realized: That experience changed her. It forced her to grow. It made her prioritize. She learned things about herself and got clear about what she wants for her life. She can't forget and go back to the way it used to be or the woman she used to be.

Malcolm hadn't changed. She had.

Both Kelly and Malcolm have new information: They no longer want the same things. They have different priorities and completely different goals. People told Kelly, "You're just not on the same page anymore." She would reply, "We're not even in the same library."

### **Our Happiness Is Our Responsibility**

What would happen if you gave up the idea that your partner needs to change? How would you show up in your relationship with him if you didn't need him to change anything about himself in order for you to be happy? How would you show up for yourself each day if your happiness wasn't conditional, wasn't dependent on his actions or inactions?

Most of us live pretty conditional lives. We're happy when things are going our way, when we feel really connected to the people in our lives. When our husbands can't be who we need them to be, we can sometimes bring a more controlling energy to the relationship. We try to convince, to badger, to fight, to reason with him—all varying and fruitless attempts to get him to change, which only makes him shut down. The more we push, the further away he gets.

Over time, the disconnection in our marriages grows wider. Over time, the loneliness we feel in our hearts grows deeper. Until, eventually, we're so unhappy and disconnected that the pain is causing us to wake up and answer the question *Am I in the wrong marriage?*

But maybe that's not the right question. Maybe the question is, *Where have I made my partner responsible for my happiness?*

Imagine a relationship in which each of you take responsibility for your own happiness and neither of you need to do or be or become anything other than what you are. Imagine a relationship in which no matter what your partner does or doesn't do, you're going to choose to be happy. Imagine a relationship in which you're not there out of obligation or because you're trapped, but because when you wake up every morning there is no one else you'd rather walk beside.

There's a real sense of freedom—for both you and your partner—when you no longer make him or her responsible for your happiness.

If you can love your partner just how they are, then you can stay in the marriage and see if you can find a new path to love together, a path where you're the only person responsible for your happiness. But if you can only be happy if your partner goes through some massive changes, then I think you have your answer about what you need to do.

## Reflective Questions:

- In what ways have I tried to change my spouse to be who I want him to be?
- Is there a thought or belief I am willing to release so that I could be happy and he wouldn't have to change?
- What are three things I love and appreciate about my partner right now, just as he is? Is that enough?

# Chapter 7: Are There More Good Days than Bad Days?

*"We can sometimes love what we do not understand, but it is impossible to understand what we do not love."*

~ Anna Jameson

*Are there more good days than bad days?* This is a pragmatic question to a complex decision, but it's also a very valuable one.

There is an iPhone app created by one of my mentors, Linda Sivertsen, called The Boyfriend Log. (I get that the positioning of the app is for singles, but you can use it for your relationship with your husband just as easily.) This app helps you track how you're feeling about your relationship each day and creates an undeniable visual representation to understand how things are really going (both currently and over time) between you and your partner.

By giving your relationship a temperature check each day and selecting a mood for "romantic," "happy," "flat," "sad" or "angry," the predominant feelings you're experiencing about your marriage form patterns. Before too long, you will clearly be able to see whether you're having more good days or bad days. You'll have more certainty about whether it's time to settle back in and reengage, or move on. Colors don't lie. And they just might empower you.

## **Knowing What Feels Good**

Many of us walk around dead from the neck down. We let our minds run wild, sending us fearful messages, and we believe those thoughts are actually true. But our minds will lie to us all day long. The mind is where the ego lives. The mind is where fears hide. Our minds want to keep us free from harm and therefore tell us we should be kept in a safe, small, secure box.

Our minds aren't to be trusted. But we can absolutely trust our bodies. Our bodies have no reason to or any way to lie to us. That's the basis for the lie detector test: We can't maintain the same physical reactions when we're lying, even to ourselves, as when we're being completely honest.

Think about a time when you felt a gut instinct that something was wrong. Did you feel tightness in your chest or throat? A weight on your shoulders? Was your stomach nauseous? That's your body talking to you. For me, when something isn't right for me, it feels as if my forearms are being squeezed between two anvils—a painful, tight pressure isolated in my forearms.

We know when something doesn't feel right, but maybe no one has taught us or given us permission to trust our body signals or intuition.

Think about a time that felt really good, when you were on top of the world and having an experience that was great for you. Did you feel a lightness in your chest or lungs? Did you have what felt like butterflies in your stomach? Were your jaw and facial muscles relaxed? Your body was sending those messages to tell you: *Whatever it is you're doing, it's good, so keep doing it.* When I'm having an exceptionally happy moment, I feel my arms get tingly and sometimes I'll get goosebumps on my forearms.

You know when something is good for you because you can feel it. You know truth when you feel it in your body. *You can trust those sensations.*

Knowing what feels good in your body and what doesn't is a profoundly valuable tool. You can use it to guide your life, taking one step at a time and checking in with what you feel in your body to help you keep on track.

### **Take a Step and See How It Feels**

My client, Karie, decided to separate from her husband. She created a document that outlined the ground rules so there would be no confusion and it would make the kids feel more stable. One of the smartest things she and her husband decided on was to not discuss the status of their relationship until the end of the trial separation. That took the day-to-day pressure off about knowing where the marriage stood and allowed them both to simply gather more information and gain some additional clarity about their relationship.

A few weeks into the separation, I asked Karie how she was feeling. She said she felt really good. She felt like she was less distracted and was able to be more present for and engaged with her children. She felt like she was taking better care of herself and she had begun exercising more and sleeping more soundly. When I asked her how she felt physically, she shared that she felt free, lighter, and more relaxed. Her palms tingled and her chest felt fluttery.

Karie took a step—in her case, a trial separation—and gathered information. Because she was feeling good, after a few months, she took another step and spoke with a lawyer. That didn't give her a fluttery feeling, but it didn't give her pain, tightness, or heaviness either. She kept putting one foot in front of the other and taking inventory of how it felt in her body before she took another step. She trusted her body's wisdom.

Your steps may be much smaller than Karie's. You may choose to start with having a date night with your spouse to see how that feels. If that step seems too large, maybe you just do something nice for him, such as take him coffee tomorrow morning, and see how that feels in your body. Just keep taking little steps and checking-in with your body.

Our bodies speak to us in very simple sentences: *Yes* and *No*. When you get a *No* feeling in your body, please don't stay there. Try something else, and keep trying new steps until you find something that feels like *Yes!* in your body.

### **Life Should Feel Good**

Contrary to popular opinion, life is not supposed to be hard. *Life sucks and then you die* is a big, fat lie. We're supposed to feel good. We're supposed to live with joy and ease. We're supposed to be surrounded by abundance—an abundance of time, health, love, joy, friends, money, great relationships, laughter, and meaning.

Love should feel like home. It should feel safe. It should be filled with laughter and joy. It should feel like acceptance. Love should feel authentic and nurturing.

Love should feel like freedom.

When you think about your marriage, how do you feel?

When you think about the life you've created for yourself, how do you feel?

When you think about love, how do you feel?

### **The Whispers Don't Get Quieter**

Your marriage has been whispering to you. Your heart has been whispering to you. Your soul has been whispering to you.

Those whispers carry important information for your life.

When we ignore the whispers, they don't become quieter. They get louder. That may show up as emotional pain and depression, physical illness, getting fired from your job, creating

an addiction, or responding to other men who seem to offer everything you're lacking in your marriage.

Your life is whispering to you. Listen. Be still. Breathe. Invite the answer in. Wait for it to come. Trust that it will. Pay attention. Trust what you feel.

## Reflective Questions:

- If my body speaks to me through a very simple *Yes* or *No*, where does *Yes!* show up in my body—what are those physical sensations? Where does *No* show up in my body and how does it feel?
- What feels like one small step I can take to gain some information and closer to my answer?
- Am I willing to track how I'm feeling about my marriage for the next 60 to 90 days by noticing once a day how I feel about it and documenting it?

**Section II:**

*What if the Answer is No?*

# Chapter 8: Giving Up the Struggle

*“If you knew your potential to feel good, you would ask no one to be different so that you can feel good. You would free yourself of all that cumbersome impossibility of needing to control the world, or control your mate or control your child.”*

~ Esther Hicks

If the answer to your question *Am I in the wrong marriage?* is *No*, that means you’re going to remain in the relationship. There’s enough there in the relationship that is worth riding out this particular storm.

Staying in a relationship you were previously questioning doesn’t mean you have to somehow make yourself okay with the pain or unhappiness that brought you to the question in the first place. You don’t have to settle back into *fine* or *ordinary* or especially not *unhappy*. It does, however, mean that it’s time to:

Take responsibility for your own happiness

Change your perspective

Give up the struggle and the need to control

## **Our Happiness is Our Responsibility**

There is one common thread that accounts for the majority of the problems in relationships today: wanting our partner to be or do or become something different than what they are so that we can feel better.

If he would stop poking fun at me in front of our friends, I would be more confident.

If he would just be more engaged and communicate more, I would feel heard and validated.

If he wasn’t always so negative, my life would be more optimistic and I would be happier.

People are constantly showing us who they are. The problem comes when we don’t like what we see and get frustrated and allow them to steal our joy.

When we give someone else the task of being responsible for our happiness, we'll always end up disappointed. On any given day, taking the actions, thinking the thoughts, and creating a life that brings us happiness is quite enough to manage for ourselves; imagine having to carry the weight of all that for someone else as well.

But it's not anyone else's job to make us happy.

It's our job to take responsibility for our own happiness.

It's our job to take care of ourselves and make the choice to be happy, even when—especially when—not everything is going our way.

### **A Shift in Perspective**

We come into this life for a purpose, for a journey all our own. Our souls have a path. Your husband's soul has a path. Your children's souls have their own paths (but that could be a whole book in itself). Yes, these paths have intersected, but that does not make you responsible for their journeys in addition to your own. It's actually quite the contrary. It makes you responsible for your journey because when our own journeys are tended to by each of us, we each evolve with perfect timing and are able to be there for one another in a whole new way.

Spiritual teacher Byron Katie has a beautiful theory about tending to your own journey. She believes any situation can only fall into one of three categories: my business, your business, or God's business.

My business is all the things I can control about my experience: my choices, my actions and behaviors, and, to a certain degree, my thoughts.

Your business is the things you can control about your experience: your choices, your actions and behaviors, and, to a certain degree, your thoughts.

God's business is all the things no one else can control, such as natural disasters, when the sun is going to shine and when it's going to rain, and when the day comes that I will no longer walk this life.

You can only be in one of those places at any given time. And when you're in someone else's business, then you are not in your own business and so you're not there for you. No one's minding your journey.

When you're in somebody else's business, you also are causing yourself unnecessary suffering.

For instance, whose business am I in when I'm thinking that my husband should have taken out the garbage when it was full (*How could he not see that?!?*)? I'm in his business.

Whose business are you in when you're worrying that your husband thinks you should lose some weight? You're in his business.

Whose business are you in when you're trying to understand why your partner cheated? You're in your partner's business, which means no one's tending to you, your heart, and your needs.

We can release a tremendous amount of suffering when we commit to staying in our own business.

### **Give Up the Struggle**

Kayla was struggling in her marriage because her husband, William, wanted her to be someone she wasn't. He wanted her to be a corporate dynamo and a wonderful hostess for all of his company events held at their beautiful suburban home. He wanted her to plaster a smile on her face and pass the tray of gourmet appetizers, but all she really wanted to do was go to a yoga class or spend the afternoon at the pool with her kids.

In all fairness, there's a reason why he wanted this: that's who she was when they got married. But nearly 20 years later, after a chronic illness and having overcome depression, Kayla's not that same woman. She cares far less about *things* and far more about *experiences*. She's not concerned with keeping up with the Joneses—she just wants to raise confident children who have peaceful and loving hearts.

Kayla wants William to open his heart to her, to make himself vulnerable and share his thoughts and feelings.

She wants him to do something he's never done in their 20 year marriage.

If their marriage is going to last, they each have to give up the idea that their partners need to be something other than who they are and who they've become.

Our marriages are an ongoing dance we do together to grow and accept, to evolve and discover each other together.

The only person we can ever really change or control is ourselves. We can control our choices, our actions and behaviors, and, to a certain degree, our thoughts. But that's about it. There's very little else we can control in this world and controlling or changing our spouses isn't one of them.

Sorry to be the one to break the news to you, but Soulful Truth Telling is about disbelieving the lies that keep us stuck in the struggle, and I'm all about your freedom.

### **It's Quite Enough**

Our spouse's happiness: *Not our jobs.*

What our partners should be doing but aren't: *Not our business.*

Our wishes for them to grow or evolve or become: *Not our journey.*

We are the keepers and the creators of our own happiness. No one else can do it. It's not only our responsibility, it's also our privilege in this life to create our own happiness.

We are the caretakers of caring for ourselves. We cannot expect to be a priority to anyone else if we're not a priority in our own lives. We have to care enough about ourselves to do what we can each day to feel happy.

We are the lovers of our own hearts. We need to give up the struggle and show up in love—for ourselves and for the most important people in our lives. That's our only job and that's quite enough.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- In what ways have I been in someone else's business?
- What's one thing I can do to remain in my own business?
- What is one struggle in my relationship that I'm willing to release?

# Chapter 9: What Do I Need Him to Know?

*“Communication is a continual balancing act, juggling the conflicting needs for intimacy and independence.”*

~ Deborah Tannen

Too often, we only really connect or communicate with our partners if we're really happy or if we're really upset about something. But if you picked-up this book, you went through some soul searching to answer an important question for your life and for your marriage. Your partner should know a little about the journey you're going through, even if you're not exceedingly upset or tremendously happy.

He should know that you began questioning the relationship and what led you to those questions.

He should know that you found out some important things that led you to your decision.

He should know that you're recommitting to the relationship in a new way.

When communication is absent in a relationship, there's an abyss that continues to become wider over time.

When communication is unclear in a relationship, we can end up unintentionally hurting each other with our words.

As you open up and share a piece of your heart with your partner, it encourages them to open up as well. It will create a space for him to share his questions and will give him an opportunity to recommit in a new way.

If you feel like you've changed or you've grown, would it feel good to share that with your love?

If you feel as though your life is calling you forward, but you aren't exactly sure what it will look like, would it feel good to have another set of eyes open to opportunities?

If you are seeking deeper, more meaningful connections across all your relationships, would it feel good to describe to your beloved how much richer your conversations are now with your best girlfriend?

Surely there are some things you need your spouse to know. Surely there's something you want to share with him or her. Surely there's something on your heart that needs to be said.

### **Communicate without Expectations**

Having expectations for our partners is another version of attempting to control the uncontrollable. Our responsibility is to love, to be open, and to be honest; their reactions are not our responsibility or our business.

When you communicate, do so without expectations around how you want your partner to react; simply share a part of your heart with him because it feels good to do so. He doesn't need to do anything with it, he doesn't need to have a reaction. He doesn't even have to reciprocate (although it's very likely that he will).

### **Expressing Your Needs**

Just because you *can* do it all doesn't mean you *should*.

You have a career. You have a home. You have children. You have a marriage.

You can lead a team at work to deliver on time and under budget.

You can do all the grocery shopping, cook many of the meals, take care of the laundry, and even occasionally clean the house.

You can make sure the kids get to practice on time and get their homework done. You go to parent-teacher conferences and make sure the kids have what they need for the science project, the track meet, and the homecoming dance.

I get it. But just because you can do it all doesn't mean you should.

*Don't you think it's time to take off the cape?*

Betsy was that Super-Mom. She felt like she was always running from one thing to the next. When her career began to take off, the demands at home only increased. When her girls needed new shoes, she made sure they had them. When the budgets at work were suddenly due a week early, she got them done. When there was no milk in the refrigerator or clean socks in the drawers, she did what she needed to do. She often felt like everything was hanging by a thin thread that could break at anytime, and that eventually it would all come tumbling down around her.

Betsy began getting really frustrated with her husband, Bill, when her efforts seemed to go unnoticed. In her eyes, he didn't seem to even break a sweat on any given day. *Can't he see me struggling? Why doesn't he help me?* They grew further and further apart, and Betsy always seemed to be angry and frustrated with Bill.

When I asked Betsy if she ever expressed her needs to her husband, she said *no*. She never told him how much pressure she felt. She expected him to be able to read her mind, to sense what she needed him to do. They spent years in that cycle, spinning in circles and never feeling content or happy. They spent years growing apart, because she couldn't or wouldn't express her needs.

When you are able to honor your own needs, it is an act of love for yourself.

When you are able to express your needs, it is an act of love for the other person in the relationship.

### **You're Building a Muscle**

If expressing yourself is new for you, think of it as building a muscle. You pick up a two-pound weight and do a few reps. Once you've done that a few days or weeks, lifting that two-pound weight is easy. So you reach for the five-pound weight and do a few reps. The more you pick up that weight, the more you practice lifting it, the stronger you become. The more you express what you need, the easier it becomes to share your fears. The more you communicate what's on your mind, the easier it becomes to communicate what's in your heart. And before long you're lifting 50-pound dumbbells with ease.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- Have I been able to articulate my journey to date with my spouse, speaking my truth from the heart? If not, how am I allowing fear to hold me back? And what is it that I think I have to lose at this point?
- What's one thing I need my partner to know right now?

# Chapter 10: What Can I Do Differently?

*“Often finding meaning is not about doing things differently; it is about seeing familiar things in new ways.”*

~ Rachel Naomi Remen

We have a role in the creation of our life experiences and the same is true with our experiences in love. Even when something isn't how we want it to be, we likely played some small part in its creation. When we're able to see how things aren't happening *to* us but rather *through* us, we have the opportunity to do something different in order to create a different experience.

Maybe we abandoned our hearts emotionally, physically or spiritually.

Maybe we became far more worried about making everyone else happy than making ourselves happy.

Maybe we allowed other voices to drown out our own.

Maybe we allowed behavior we knew wasn't okay.

Maybe we didn't tell ourselves the truth.

No one is saying you did anything wrong. This is not the time to beat yourself up or to use insights as a weapon against yourself. It is the time to become *compassionately curious* about your role—in order to look at the larger, broader goal of creating a different experience inside your marriage.

## **The Journey Is Always Within**

All the answers we ever need lie within. Now that we understand our roles in these past experiences, we can use that understanding as a tool to create new, different experiences.

When you answered *No* to the important question of *Am I in the wrong marriage?*, your answer didn't include saying you have to suck it up and just stay miserable. Your *No* was about

saying, *There's enough here that I can work with to create the happy life and loving relationship I want.*

Want what you want. But don't look for someone else to give it to you; instead create it for yourself.

Instead of putting your needs on the back burner, take time to listen to your body, understand your needs, and then honor them. Instead of trying to make everyone else happy, first do what you need to do to fill your own tank.

Instead of allowing other voices to drown out yours, communicate what you want and need—honestly, lovingly, and transparently communicate what it is that you desire.

Instead of allowing someone to treat you disrespectfully, stand up for yourself and communicate how you do want to be treated.

These are acts of love you take for yourself. As you show up consistently for yourself in love, several things will happen:

You will show up differently in your most important relationships. You'll become more patient with your spouse and more present for your children.

You'll find that as you take care of yourself and your needs you actually have more to give to others, not less.

You'll find that people will respond to you differently than they did before. You teach others how to treat you based upon how you treat yourself. When you begin to honor your needs and treat yourself with great care and kindness, others will begin to do that as well.

## **See Through New Eyes**

Samantha had grown distant from her husband Tom over the years and now, although she had love for him, there were days she couldn't feel an attraction towards him. One of the things that helped her through this time in her marriage was to see her husband through new eyes; specifically, other people's eyes.

Her girlfriends would say, *"You're so lucky to have Tom. He's such a great guy."* The women in the neighborhood would often compare Tom to their husbands. *"Tom is always so thoughtful. I wish my husband was more like that."*

When Samantha was struggling to get the spark back with her husband, she allowed her friends' words to gently ring in her ears. Gradually, as she allowed herself the time and space to

find her way back to Tom. As she did that, she was able to see her beloved through new eyes. She began to see how truly amazing he really was. She could see how thoughtful and caring he was. She began to feel fortunate to have him by her side.

You've made the decision to remain in your marriage, so line up with that decision. Change your perspective about your relationship. Choose to focus on all the positive qualities of your husband, because what you focus on expands. Let him know you're noticing all those wonderful qualities. Make the attempt to see your beloved through new, clear, and forgiving eyes.

### **Let it be Different**

Several years after my divorce, I met the great love of my life. Derrick is a firefighter and paramedic who goes fishing in his free time. He is the healthiest person I know, never putting anything artificial into his body and rarely drinking alcohol. He is always learning something new and we call him a dog whisperer because every dog seems to obey him with just a look.

Derrick is patient, open and honest. He is communicative, strong, and confident. He is equal parts peace and passion. His love – without a doubt – is the greatest gift of my life.

My marriage with Derrick is different because not only is he different, but I am different. I appreciate joy more now because I've known pain. I appreciate intimacy now because I've felt the painful void of disconnection. I appreciate ease now because I know what difficult feels like. Of course we have our obstacles, but I trust in the natural ebb and flow of our marriage. And I believe in the entity of us.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- What was my role in the creation of our experience to date?
- When was a time I didn't express my feelings or needs in our marriage? What was the result of that experience? Knowing what I know now, if I could re-do that experience, what would I do differently?
- What is one thing—something that feels light and easy—I can do differently to line up with my decision to remain in my marriage?

# Chapter 11: How Can We Move Forward in a New Way?

*“What screws us up most in life is the picture in our heads of what it’s supposed to be.”*

~ Socrates

Let’s be honest. You wouldn’t have selected this book if all was well in your marriage at the time you made your selection. But in this section, where we do a deep dive of what to do when you want to remain in the marriage, there are lessons to be found that can make you think about your marriage in a new way.

If you’re recommitting to your spouse, begin to think of this as *My Marriage 2.0*. The first version was how you came together, fell in love, and decided to marry. That version may have started when you spent more time planning the wedding and preparing the bridal registry than planning the marriage. My Marriage 1.0 was likely where you grew up a bit, learned what you wanted, and, through contrast, what you didn’t want. You learned that marriage is not easy and is never stationary. It’s also where you began to learn a bit about who you are as an individual.

This next phase of your marriage, you get to create. If your heart has caused you to desire intimacy, vulnerability, and a deep, soulful connection, *want it*. If your soul has been longing for an easy, relaxing, and comfortable kind of love, *create it*. Think about what you want to create inside your marriage and then begin taking small steps toward an existing relationship that looks and feels different than it did before.

Rather than sink back into the thought that you have to go back to the way it was or the way it’s always been, think about how the two of you can move forward in an entirely new way.

## **Creating Something You’ve Never Seen**

Maybe you’re like me—maybe you grew up with the idea that you should meet a nice guy in college and get married after graduation. You get a good job, buy a nice house, get a dog, have two kids. You work in your chosen profession for decades, until you can one day retire. Whether or not you’re happy in your profession (that you likely chose when you were 22 years

old) is irrelevant. You do what you have to do because that's how life is. You stay married to your spouse forever, because you said, *"til death do us part."* Whether or not you're happy in your marriage is irrelevant. You do what you have to do because you've made your choice.

In the journeys of our lives, we pick-up thoughts about how life is supposed to be. We learn what is right and approved and what is wrong and frowned upon. We learn these thoughts from our families, our friends, and our culture. Because we think those thoughts for decades and because everyone around us carries similar thoughts, over time those thoughts become deeply held beliefs.

We carry those beliefs into our chosen professions, into our daily choices and definitely into our relationships. Our beliefs influence how we treat ourselves and what we believe is possible for us. These beliefs become the lens through which we experience the world and each other. When these beliefs go unchallenged, they can unintentionally sabotage our relationships.

Maybe you're like my client Jennifer, who believed all the princess fairy tales she grew up reading. When she was young, she thought her life would begin when she found her prince. She thought finding that love would be the most difficult part. When she and Stephen got married, she was too naive to realize that the journey – and the hard work – were just beginning.

Although Jennifer's marriage with Stephen didn't have a happy ending, the dream about what she thought love and marriage would look like lived on in her mind. When she met her second prince, she was determined to make this one work. She put her needs aside in favor of his desires and put her happiness on the back burner so their only son could take center stage. She was on the PTA, she attended all his little league baseball games, and made sure he wanted for nothing. In her relationship with her husband, she thought that if she looked perfect, acted perfect, and did everything right, he would stay and they would live happily ever after.

Jennifer is now 54 years old and on her third marriage. Of course she wants this one to last. She has let go of her ideas of what love is supposed to look like in favor of creating a marriage like none she's ever experienced before. She wants this marriage to be one that feels really good; one that feels like home.

She wants a love that doesn't try to be the fairy-tale.

She wants a love different from what was modeled by her parents.

She wants a love that doesn't look like what any of her friends seem to have.

She wants a love that doesn't feel like any of her past loves.

And Jennifer will have it, because she's committed to giving up the thoughts and beliefs that no longer serve her, and because she knows what she wants and is becoming intentional about creating it. She's finally telling the truth to herself about what she's been settling for and what is possible.

*And Jennifer, in some ways, is just like you.*

I know what Jennifer is wanting for her life is possible, because I have done it myself. My relationship with Derrick doesn't look like my parents' relationship. My relationship with Derrick looks nothing like what I've seen or felt or experienced with anyone else I've been with, ever. It's a love bigger than I knew how to pray for and deeper than I knew was possible. And our relationship gets better with each passing day and stronger with every passing moment. Just when I think it's as good as it will ever be, we grow closer, more in love, and more ourselves.

*And I am just like you.*

This is not magic, although magic happens when you start to get honest with yourself and begin to see how you co-create your love and relationship experiences.

This kind of love is not only for the few and the lucky. Anyone brave enough to look truth in the eye can have this.

Anyone who is willing to see how their thoughts and deeply held beliefs impact their relationships, and then consciously, bravely, and intentionally interrupt those thought patterns can create love that looks dramatically different than what they've known before.

### **Grant Yourself Permission**

Give yourself permission to explore this idea of changing your thoughts and beliefs. Give yourself permission to play, to create, to try something new just to see if it feels good or not. Follow what feels good; drop what doesn't. Grant yourself permission to create a relationship unlike what you've seen or experienced previously. Think of this 2.0 version of your marriage as if it's a wide, open, unpainted canvas in front of you and you get to envision and create your own masterpiece there.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- When I married, what was the image I had in my mind of what life and marriage were supposed to look like?
- When I allow myself to dream, what does the 2.0 version of my marriage look and feel like?
- What's one action I can take to bring that dream to life today? This week? This month?

# Chapter 12: What Have I Learned?

*“You have to grow from the inside out. No one can teach you. No one can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul.”*

~ Swami Vivekananda

Our souls come into this life for their own journeys, their own evolution and their own lessons. Our souls lead us to the people who will become our greatest teachers. Our souls present us with the challenges that offer us the greatest lessons for our lives. Our closest relationships are always our greatest spiritual teachers.

The people we marry and commit to spending our lives with will be the ones who teach us the most— mostly about ourselves. That’s one of the reasons they’re present in our lives. But as helpful as they are at pressing our buttons, being our mirrors, and presenting us with the lessons we most need to learn, they’re equally as helpful at teaching us unconditional love, boundaries, and the importance of self-love.

We now know that the only change we can impact is the change within ourselves. So that’s where the lessons are found: within. While others may bring the lessons to our doorsteps, it’s our job to open the door and allow them into our hearts.

This is a time to take stock of what you’ve learned, so that you can show up differently for yourself and for your relationships.

It’s time to pay attention to what you’ve learned and how you’ve grown through this experience.

It’s time to understand what you’ve learned about yourself, what you’ve learned about love, what you’ve learned about your marriage, and what you’ve learned about being a lover, friend and partner.

## **What I’ve Learned**

Through love, what I’ve learned about myself is that I have a big heart and a brave spirit. I know that my heart is the most precious gift I can give someone, so only those who deserve it and can treat it with both kindness and respect get a key.

What I've learned about love is that it is by far, the most powerful force in the universe. We were born from it, we live for it, and, in the end, it's all we're here to do. I've learned that nothing is impossible when love is present.

What I've learned about marriage is that it's a dance. It's not always in step and on time and it's not always graceful, but when both souls are engaged and paying attention, it can be a lot of fun.

What I've learned is that inside of my marriage, there are times that I am a passionate lover, a committed friend and an unwavering partner. There are times that I am strong and times when I am weak. There are times when I am fabulous and flirtatious and other times when I am messy and magnificent. Inside of my marriage, my husband gets all the parts of me; and I of him.

What I've learned about relationships, in general, is that there is a subtle but tremendous difference between effort and force. There's not a damn thing wrong with effort. Many good things in our lives come with some effort; there's strength in effort.

But almost nothing good comes from force.

Attempting to use force when it comes to relationships can be painful and grueling, and leaves us feeling weak and defeated. It's the difference between paddling upstream and turning your raft downstream.

## **Joy Versus Pain**

I am often asked, *"Can I learn as much from joyful experiences as I can from painful experiences?"* The short answer is, *"Yes."* The longer answer is, *"Yes, but we're not as motivated to."*

While we can bask in joyful experiences all day, we tend to learn the most from our painful experiences, because they push us to the point of surrender. We know we have to find another way when staying in the pain is no longer an option. Pain brings us to our knees, where real transformation can take place.

Getting to the answer of the important question of *Am I in the wrong marriage?* isn't a joy-ride. It's a soul-searching journey to the heart. It can be uncomfortable at best, debilitating at worst.

But if you've answered the question, surely that means you've learned something along the way that can be used to propel you forward to create the kind of loving relationship you

desire. And once you learn something, you can't un-learn it. You can't go back to the way it used to be. You can't see things through the same lens. And you can't pretend you don't know what you've come to know.

### **What Others Have Said**

When you're in this situation of revising your view of your marriage with the intent to make it stronger and better, there will be lots of people with lots of advice about what you should do or shouldn't do and how you should feel or shouldn't feel. Remember, those well-intentioned people—your friends and family—are telling you their stories. That's actually all they're able to tell you, because that's what they know: their life experiences through their lenses.

I have coached many people who questioned the relationship they were in but decided to remain—not because they gave up, but because they weren't ready yet to give up. *You* get to choose what meaning you give to your reasons to remain in your marriage.

Once those I've coached learned how to love their partners as new people and through a different lens, they were able to see their lessons and the personal growth they'd gained from their journey much more clearly.

One of my clients, Jessica, learned that, "Sometimes you just have to ride the storm out to see where the tornado takes you. You may actually like Oz better than Kansas."

My client Samantha learned how to inspire the best parts of her husband to come out and take center stage just by focusing on those parts of him. Once she began focusing in that way and acknowledging her love of those pieces, he began responding.

My client Jack learned that he cannot ever change his long-term partner and, in the end, that was a blessing. Just because he and Jack do things differently doesn't make Jack's partner's approach wrong.

### **The Signature of Your Soul**

Is there something you know beyond a shadow of a doubt, but you don't really know why you know it? Do you have an inner knowing that you don't question or wonder about, that you somehow know is true?

It could be a knowing about who you are or about what you're here to do. It could be a knowing about being an affectionate lover or being a guiding parent. It could be a knowing

about what truth and freedom feel like in your body or what authenticity and acceptance feel like in your bones.

All the things you know—without knowing how you know—comprise the signature of your soul. And that signature can guide your actions and decisions much more gracefully and honestly than your mind ever could. Pay attention to those feelings. They are the real lessons your soul has come here to learn and know. They are the things that make you a better partner today than you were yesterday.

## Reflective Questions:

- What have I learned about myself by being in this marriage?
- What have I learned about love?
- What have I learned about marriage and relationships?
- What does my soul know beyond a shadow of a doubt? How does that awareness make me a better partner in my marriage?

# Chapter 13: Wanting What You Want

*“Losses aren’t cataclysmic if they teach the heart and soul the natural cycle of breaking and healing. A real tragedy? That’s the loss of the heart and the soul themselves. If you’ve abandoned yourself in the effort to keep anyone or anything else, unlearn that pattern...Just like that, your heart and soul will return home.”*

~ Martha Beck

We only want something because of the way we think it will make us feel once we have it. We want more money because we want a sense of security and freedom. We want health because we want to feel physically strong and more youthful. We want an amazing relationship because we want to feel loved and adored.

We want what we want because of how we think it will make us feel. We want things, people, and experiences that will make us happier, healthier, and feel more complete.

Once we’re clear about what we want in our marriage, we only deviate from that vision if we somehow come to think we can’t have it. If we lose faith that it’s attainable, that’s when we begin to lower our standards, neglect our needs, and tell ourselves we need to just learn to live with it if we want to remain.

This is why knowing what you want and why you want it is so important. It’s important to believe that what you want is not only possible, but possible with your current spouse or partner.

## **Creating a New Vision for Your Marriage**

When we’re recommitting to marriage, often there is a mental checklist that exists that we want our partner to be able to meet so that we can be happy.

The checklist of what we want may look something like this:

\_\_\_ Helps around the house

\_\_\_ Communicates with me

- \_\_\_ Is engaged in our children's lives
- \_\_\_ Is successful in career / provides for our family (without working *too much*)
- \_\_\_ Is a passionate (and faithful) lover

## Going Deeper

I suggest you go deeper than a checklist.

I suggest that your vision for the love you want with your husband, which is absolutely possible, is much bigger than your daily checklist.

Base your vision for your husband and life partner on how you want to *feel*. Base it on your desires about how you want to feel when you love and are loved by them:

How does it feel to fall asleep next to him? (*safe, warm, easy, like you're home?*)

When you're having a quiet dinner out and sitting across the table from the one you adore, how do you want to feel in their presence? (*happy, secure, adored, expansive, open?*)

When your beloved touches the small of your back or wraps his arms around you or comes up behind you and kisses your neck, what sensations do you want to experience? (*breathlessness, lightness, connection?*)

When you express your love to the one you adore, what does that look like and feel like? (*generosity, gratefulness, commitment, being present?*)

When you're walking hand-in-hand along a busy street, how do you want to feel about yourself? (*energized, confident, graceful, free?*)

These questions to ask yourself will clarify the ingredients for the marriage you really desire:

*How do I want to feel?*

*What do I want to express to my love and experience his love for me?*

Don't focus on how it is, focus on how you want it to be.

Go beyond the superficial. Go deeper. Go wider.

Make the ingredients for your marriage tangible, memorable, and sensory.

## **The Role of Law of Attraction**

Call up the vision you clarified about your marriage—how it will feel to wake up wrapped in his arms each morning or when you fall asleep next to him at night. Remind yourself how you will feel when you're sitting across the table from him and sharing a meal together. Get an emotional sense of how it will feel when he kisses you and tells you he loves you.

You actually need to feel what you want and focus on that feeling in order to bring that connection to life. You cannot wait for evidence. You cannot wish for change. And if you focus on all his faults and all the qualities you don't like, you will only invite more of that from him.

My favorite teacher of all things related to the Law of Attraction is Abraham Hicks. These teachings tell us that in order to attract what we want from who we want, we have to get to the emotional feeling state of what we want *before* it appears in our experience. We have to *feel* it and *believe* it before we can draw that out in the other person or attract it to ourselves.

That's why when we doubt that the kind of relationship we want is possible in our marriage, it can't be created.

That's why when we focus on all that's wrong and all that's lacking, what we *do* want never shows up.

That's why when we stay stuck in feelings of loneliness, abundant love from our partners never manifests.

When you focus on what you want, when you do everything you can to feel the way you *will* feel when you have the kind of relationship you desire, the Universe has to bring it to you. Once you become a vibrational match to the love you seek, it comes directly to you.

Let me say a word about Law of Attraction, about what is your work to do and what's not. When you do your work to consistently maintain the emotional feeling of what you want in a loving, connected, intimate, committed relationship, it's the Universe's job to bring that to you. It does not promise, however, that it will deliver that feeling to you in the relationship to your current partner, but it certainly could. The Universe almost always has bigger plans for you than you have the ability to see for yourself.

## **Maintaining That Emotional Feeling**

To remain in a place of feeling loved and adored before that manifestation of that kind of love occurs, you can create a daily practice to remind yourself of what it will feel like. Some people do this by creating a vision board and keeping it where they will see it frequently

(consider doing this jointly with your spouse). Others find a single image that captures the feeling they want to cultivate. One of my clients listens to a certain type of music to evoke the feeling she wants. You can write a list of how you will feel when you're in the kind of marriage you want and read through it every night before falling asleep.

Do whatever feels right for you, but do *something* intentional to cultivate the feelings you want.

Our world provides distractions that can knock us off our paths and block blessings. Honoring your intention is sacred work. Clarify your intention and protect it, love it, nurture it.

### **Contrast Provides Clarity**

You've had some experiences in your marriage that made you question the relationship. You've had some moments that made you sad or mad, hurt or confused. You've potentially even had years of the exact experiences you don't want.

All of those experiences served a purpose. They provided you contrast in order for you to know what you do want. Seeing what you don't want automatically shows you what you do want.

For instance, early in my first marriage, it wasn't a problem that my husband wasn't affectionate. I didn't grow up in an affectionate family. I didn't know how to give or receive affection myself. As a matter of fact, affection made me a bit uncomfortable.

But at about eight years into our marriage, I began noticing other couples who had a natural affection between them, the kind where a hand lands on a leg or a head gently rests on a shoulder. I would notice couples for whom conversation flowed easily and eyes never left the others' eyes. There was a comfort, an ease, and a connectedness between those people that was so foreign to me but that made my heart ache and long for more in my own relationship.

I didn't know how to have that with someone, and neither did my husband. We were both many things at that time, but we were not intimate and vulnerable with each other. That didn't stop me from wanting those things in my relationship. And, yes, that relationship ended, but that's because I gave up on the idea that he could ever provide me with what I wanted. And that's because I didn't know that the work to do was mine, not his.

For better or for worse, that experience provided me a contrasting experience of what I *didn't want*. Which meant I was getting closer to knowing what I *did want*.

## Want What You Want

I'm a big fan of wanting what you want. You likely didn't consciously place the desires you have in your heart, so you can't get rid of them either. You can deny them for a while, but your soul just dies a little more with each passing day they remain suppressed.

You're not being selfish for wanting a love that feels connected and soulful. But that means you have to become soulful and connected.

You're not a bad person for wanting a relationship that's both intensely passionate and deeply intimate. This means, of course, that you have to open yourself up to become passionate and intimate yourself.

You're not aiming too high if you want to have a relationship that's fun and easy and a partner who's committed and faithful. Become that partner that's fun and easy to be with and is committed to your relationship.

*Want what you want.* Want it more than you want anything else. Get your hopes up.

Because we attract what we are, become the person you so desperately want your spouse to be.

## Reflective Questions:

- What are five adjectives that describe the way I want to feel when I'm in the relationship of my dreams?
- I know what I don't want in my marriage, so what is it that I do want?
- How can I become a person who loves the way I want to be loved?

**Section III:**

*What if the Answer is Yes?*

# Chapter 14: Permission Granted

*“Respond to any call that makes your soul happy.”*

*~ Rumi*

If the answer to your question, *Am I in the Wrong Marriage?* is *Yes*, then that means you know this relationship likely ended a long time ago and it's time to make a change.

There's nothing easy about leaving. There's nothing simple about making the choice that the best thing for you, your heart and your soul is to no longer be in your existing relationship. And it is infinitely easier to set-up a home and a family with someone than it is to dismantle it.

But it can be done. It can be done with intention, respect and love – at least for yourself, if not for the one you once loved.

## **Fear or Love**

Throughout the process of exiting your relationship – sometimes daily – you will have the choice on whether you want to walk in fear or walk in love.

Walking in fear looks like:

Worrying about the distribution of money and possessions.

Being inflexible with the children's schedule.

Carrying the weight of resentments, blame and judgment with you each day.

Walking in love looks like:

Trusting that, for the most part, you'll get everything you need and all that is truly important to you.

Knowing that when he reacts hatefully towards you, it's only because he's hurting.

Taking exquisite care of yourself so that you can stay physically, mentally and emotionally healthy.

This process doesn't have to be harsh or hateful. You get to decide what this looks like. You get to decide what actions you take and reactions you make, which is really the only thing

you have any control of anyway. You couldn't control him when you were together, so don't cause yourself any additional and unnecessary suffering attempting to control him now.

### **Love & Boundaries Co-Existing**

My client Nicole still has love for her husband, although no longer feels *in love* with him. She appreciates his passion for his art, but there are some real deal-breakers in their relationship that make it unworkable at the moment. He has become addicted to prescription drugs and she no longer trusts him with their young children alone.

Just because she loves her husband doesn't necessarily mean that she wants to continue in the relationship as it is. Just because she loves him doesn't mean they have to spend the rest of their lives together. She can still have love for her husband and have enough love for herself to set healthy boundaries for her and her children.

Love and boundaries can co-exist. As a matter of fact, at the core of self-love is the ability to set healthy boundaries for yourself. Knowing the difference between what feels good and what feels bad and honoring that feeling. It's the difference between abandoning our own hearts, our needs and our voice and loving and honoring ourselves so much that we're not willing to remain in unnecessary pain. It's not allowing someone else's voice drown out our own. It's making the intentional choice to no longer deny who we are so that our partner can feel more secure, accepted or better about themselves.

That may sound selfish to you. That's okay.

We've been brought up to believe that we shouldn't be selfish. Particularly as women and as mothers, we're taught from a very young age that everyone else's needs and wants should come before our own. But in the wake of those teachings, we now have an entire generation of women that have lost themselves, that are exhausted, and have nothing left to give anyone else (much less themselves).

Give yourself permission to be selfish enough to set boundaries that honor your heart, and to create space for the things that make you come alive. Become selfish enough to take care of yourself so that you have something to give to others. Your presence and your love is what people want; but you can't actually give that until you're present and loving toward yourself first.

### **Give Yourself Permission**

As a part of my coaching practice, I often guide my clients through an exercise where they create permission slips for themselves. They create boxes in their journal that are big enough to write in and at the top of the page, they write the words, *I Give Myself Permission to...*

Through this exercise, these brave clients going through an enormous transition in their lives will give themselves permission to:

Take incredibly good care of themselves.

Ask for support.

Do what feels good - without guilt or shame or judgment.

Embrace the parts of themselves that are less than perfect.

Place their needs before their children's wants.

Want what they want and to know they can have it.

I was doing this exercise with one of my clients, who I'll refer to as Tina. Tina was going through her second divorce and living alone for the first time in a long time. She knew that what she was doing was the right thing for her, but that didn't make the loneliness any less difficult.

Tina had made 8 or 10 permission slips for herself, when she stopped to ask me, *"Isn't this just giving ourselves permission to create and live the life we want to live?"*

Yes, actually. That's exactly what this is.

Tina wanted to travel and had never left the US; so she's going to Italy on one of my women's retreats.

Tina wanted to be able to trust her own judgment again and feel confident that she wouldn't make the same mistakes again; she now sees people for who they are, as they are. She has ended painful, draining friendships and she has turned down dates with self-centered narcissists.

Tina wanted to explore her passions, so she's now spending more of her free time doing the things she loves: genealogy, crafts and going for long walks.

As you are navigating this transition, what is it that you need to give yourself permission to do, want or experience?

I GIVE MYSELF PERMISSION TO...

### **Permission to Release Judgments**

One of my dear friends was with a man for 11 years who I thought was immature and unfaithful to her. This friend of mine is precious and kind and loving – and in my opinion drop dead beautiful inside and out. I could never understand why she stayed with him. But the fact that I even wondered about that while they were together meant that I was judging her and judging their relationship.

I now believe that no one knows what's happening inside of a relationship unless you're one of the two people in that relationship. Your decision to leave your marriage will make the people surrounding you incredibly uncomfortable. It will bring up all the fears they have about their own relationships and their judgments of you.

If you're the one who is making the choice to leave; you are automatically the one at fault and the one towards which most blame will be pointed for making people uncomfortable. You will likely lose some of your mutual friends. You may feel abandoned by people that you thought cared about you. People who you barely know will judge you. When that happens, it won't feel good.

But, here's the thing: Their judgments of you are theirs. They created them, they get to keep and carry them. You get to make the choice whether you want to pick them up and carry them with you. Don't take them on as your own.

What your judgments are of you, however, are critically important. Your self-judgments will hold you back from everything it is you want and desire for your life. For instance, if you believe that you are a bad person for leaving a "perfectly-good" marriage, you may very well attract some bad people into your life. If you judge yourself as unworthy of love, you may never find love again.

You get to decide how you view your story. You get to decide what this will mean in your life. And you get to determine how your story will end. You can tell whatever story you'd like about this experience. It can be a horror story, just as easily as it can be a love story. It can

have a tragic ending, just as easily as it can be a peaceful ending to what was. Look through your lens and decide how you want this story to be told from your soul.

### **One More Permission Slip**

There's one more permission slip that I want you to give yourself: permission to evolve. The transitional times in our lives provide us an opportunity to grow in ways we wouldn't have been capable of previously.

Inside of my safe, suburban marriage, there was no way I could have grown into a woman who could understand heartbreak at a deep level.

Inside of my Catholic upbringing, there was no way I could have explored spirituality and be able to listen to the whispers of my soul.

Inside of my corporate career, there was no way I could have let my authentic self come out to play.

Transitional times give us the greatest opportunity to welcome change and to evolve beyond where we are currently on our soul's journey.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- What are the 3 things I need to give myself permission to do, be, think, or feel right now?
- What is the story that I want to tell about this transition?
- How can I give myself permission to evolve a bit more from where I am right now?

# Chapter 15: The “F” Word in Marriage

*“How strange that the nature of life is change, yet the nature of human beings is to resist change. And how ironic that the difficult times we fear might ruin us are the very ones that can break us open and help us blossom into what we were meant to be.”*

~ Elizabeth Lesser, *Broken Open: How Difficult Times can Help Us Grow*

It’s written into our marriage vows:

*“...to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, **till death do us part.**”*

*“...in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others keep thee only unto her/him as long **as you both shall live?**”*

*“...I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love and honor you **all the days of my life.**”*

It almost doesn’t matter what religion we’re talking about, it’s there. The promise in marriage that we will be together forever and that forever means until we die. So, of course, every single one of us goes into marriage with the belief that it will – and it should – last forever. And that anything less than forever (as we know it) is unacceptable.

So, I hear many of my clients use the “F” word when they talk about their marriage: *It was supposed to be forever.*

*Forever*, back in the year 1900, was 48 for women, while the average age to marry was almost 22. The life expectancy in 2010 was 81 for women, but the age to marry was 26. So, for women, the age to marry only increased by 4 years in 110 years, but the life expectancy increased by 33 years.

So, possibly we can lighten up a bit on the idea and steadfast definition of forever. Possibly we can see that as our definition of forever grows, our ability to stay, grow, and evolve as individuals might need to evolve as well.

Anne was married for 27 years to someone that verbally and emotionally abused her for the majority of that time. She stayed as long as she did because that was the kind of treatment

she grew up with from her parents and therefore, expected in all of her relationships. She also thought it would impact her children negatively and she always swore she would walk over hot coals for her children. She basically did. She had stayed 27 years and probably could have stayed another 27 years living in abuse and torment, but not without slipping back into a deep depression, and not without suffering from the enormous toll it would take on her soul.

### **People Do What They Want to Do**

Our vows are essentially trying to give our partner security where insecurity exists. And we are placing boundaries up where maybe none exist already, as if we need those. *“Promise me you’ll do something that you may not want to do. And if you say it in front of enough other people, maybe you won’t do that thing that you know you want to do.”*

People do what they want to do. Period.

If you want to be standing by the side of your beloved for the rest of this life (as I do), then you will do it. You won’t do it out of obligation, complacency or humiliation to do otherwise; you’ll do it because that’s what feels good to your soul.

You can have forever if that’s what you and your partner want, but do it out of choice, rather than as a club to beat yourself up when you fall short of forever as the benchmark of marriage perfection.

### **Why We Resist Change**

I believe the biggest reason we resist change is because we fear the unknown. And when you’re dissolving a marriage, there are a lot unknowns.

*Where will I live?*

*Who will get custody of the kids?*

*Will I have enough money?*

*Will I spend the rest of my life alone?*

*What will my new life look like?*

Those unknowns can paralyze us because we like to know what’s happening and we like to feel like we’re in complete control of our lives.

Your outcome depends upon the energy you bring to it. If you're in a place of trust and knowing, you will create a very different experience for your life than if you're in worry and doubt, anger and sadness. You are the one that has the opportunity to turn this experience into either a break-point or a blessing.

Anne didn't know what lied in front of her when she walked out on her 27 year marriage. One of the first things she did after her separation was to take a vacation to California to get away. She recalled that when she got off the plane in California, she heard her inner voice say to her, "There you are, Anne, I've been waiting for you."

That trip had a profound impact on the rest of her journey to find herself and create a new life after her marriage ended. What she found through our work together was her voice again and a rediscovering of her heart.

Sometimes you don't know exactly what will find you, but that doesn't mean you can't be pleasantly surprised.

### **This is Another Chapter in a Long Story**

Your husband or wife was a chapter – potentially a long, important chapter in the book of your life. For that reason alone, just because they're not going to be in your daily life from now on, does not mean they're forgotten or not an important part of your journey. Particularly if there are children, you two have an important history, so this next phase is just another chapter that you get to help write in the history of your life.

We learn and grow. We advance and evolve. If we're paying attention on our journeys, then we are always evolving into something more than we were previously. Sometimes the growth we experience as individuals moves us closer together as a couple, but sometimes we grow in different directions and the distance becomes too far to cross.

Just because your relationship wasn't forever, doesn't mean it was a mistake. It means it was an important chapter in the long story of your life. I'm grateful for all the significant relationships I've had because each was an important ingredient into the creation that is my life, my heart and the way I love.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- Am I willing to see the idea of "forever" through a softer lens?

- If this marriage is simply moving into the next chapter of the relationship, what do I want the title of that chapter to be?
- What is the intention I want to set about how I want to show up in the context of this next chapter for myself?

# Chapter 16: The Other “F” Word

*“First best is falling in love. Second best is being in love. Least best is falling out of love. But any of it is better than never having been in love.”*

~ Dr. Maya Angelou

Breakups are difficult. Heartbreak is painful. But just because a relationship fails doesn't mean the relationship was a (here comes the other “F” word.....) failure.

There is no such thing as the F word (failure) in any relationship because every relationship gives us the gift of the lesson or a new piece of information that we didn't have previously. I believe that everyone comes into our lives at the perfect time to teach us exactly what we need to learn in that moment.

The people we love – those we share pieces of our hearts with – are simultaneously our greatest challenges and our greatest spiritual teachers. These people are divine gifts, here to open us up to the deeper truths of who we really are and to challenge us to become the highest and best version of our selves.

Unlike traditional teachers who impart wisdom, our closest relationships expose all the parts of us we don't really want to own in order to teach us about forgiveness and acceptance, to bring to light our beliefs about our ability to love and be loved.

Sometimes our growth takes place through joy, but, more often than not, our most expansive growth takes place in the wake of pain. When we're in pain, we have strong motivation to try something different and abandon our old ways. When we're in pain, we're willing to move beyond our fears in the hope that there's peace on the other side.

So, it is through some of my most painful experiences, particularly in relationships, that I have had the most profound lessons in my life. It is truly those experiences that have made me the woman that I am today.

Through my relationship with my ex-husband, I learned that affection and connection are incredibly important to me in a relationship. Through that experience I also learned that living authentically is so much more important (and infinitely more fun) than trying to make my life look picture-perfect.

My relationship with Michael (the fire-starter after my first husband) changed me. He broke me wide open and, even as painful as that experience was, I could not love the way I do today without that experience. He changed the path of my life and I sit here now only in gratitude.

Julian was another significant person in my life. He helped me see that my love is profound and precious and worthy of someone who can honor that. That didn't happen to be him.

My relationships taught me that love is risky and messy, but worth it. I wouldn't go back to those times if you paid me, but I also wouldn't trade those experiences for a million dollars.

My relationship with my husband, Derrick, has taught me that it is only through great honesty, trust, and vulnerability that we find great intimacy, passion, connection, and deep, lasting love. What a gift!

My clients and I have discovered together the gifts they received from their past relationships, ranging from something as simple as a restored faith in love to something as complex as an awakening of their sexuality.

It's all so incredibly valuable ... and it's all a gift.

### **When it Gets Ugly**

I don't have a lot of heterosexual male clients, but when I do, I love to work with them. One of my favorite clients was a man that I'll refer to as Philip. Philip was in a long-term relationship with Amy, the mother of his two children, although they were never married nor lived together. Amy cheated on him throughout their nine years together, lied constantly and made Philip feel unimportant in her life. Philip was a family man who loved his children to the end of the earth and always hoped he and Amy would be able to find a way to be together as a family.

Philip's relationship with Amy caused him tremendous heartache and brought up all sorts of fears about his ongoing relationship with the children. We worked together over the course of three months and not only was he able to release his toxic relationship, he spent more time with his children and began dating again. When asked what he learned from the experience of that heartbreak, he said, *"I learned how big my heart is and what a catch I really am."*

Philip now trusts his own judgment on finding someone that is worthy of that big heart.

Sometimes, it's only when a relationship ends badly, when things become bad, that the undeniable truth comes forward. It may seem easier to write off a relationship with *'He was a jerk'* or *'He was a loser'* or even *'He was everything I ever wanted, he just didn't want me,'* but maybe not everyone who comes into our lives needs to be a jerk or a loser or a prince.

Maybe they're all teachers for us, and maybe we're teachers for them.

Maybe there is a lesson our souls needed to learn on this journey and he was the one who could be the best teacher for that particular lesson at that particular time in our lives.

Maybe he was the only one who could present the lesson in a way we could receive it. Maybe he simply needed to learn something from us, even if it was how to give or receive love.

There is no such thing as failure in a relationship – even when it breaks, hurts and falls apart. There's always a lesson and that lesson is always a gift, as long as we're prepared to take the bow off and look inside.

### **To Never Have Loved**

Elizabeth and I were having our usual weekly session and the breakup of one of her most loving and significant relationships was hitting her harder today than most days. Through her tears, she said to me, *"Sometimes I wish I never would have met him. I wish I never would have fallen in love with him, because then I wouldn't ever have to feel a pain like this."*

We can choose to hide our hearts and never really love, out of fear of being hurt. Or we can choose to love with abandon and feel all the connection, acceptance and joy we can for the time that it lasts. It could last months, years or decades.

That's the risk; that's the choice. Hide our hearts to never feel deep pain, or love with abandon so that we can feel deep love. I've been on both sides of it. I've hidden, I've worn the mask and created distance to the point where I felt lonelier than I knew was possible. I've also felt the draining pain of a love lost. To me, the bigger tragedy and the only failure would have been to never have loved at all.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- What did I learn from this past relationship? What was the lesson and where was the gift?

- Where in my life have I experienced something that at the time I considered a failure, but it later led to something even better?
- If I had to make a choice: Hide my heart forever and never experience love (and heartbreaking pain), or open my heart to real love (and take the chance that it will be broken), what would I choose?

# Chapter 17: Forgiveness

*“You give into fear. You give into worry. You give into anger. Can you give into love?”*

~ David Harshada Wagner

Forgiveness, at its core, is the intentional act of releasing resentments towards people who have wronged us or caused us pain.

Forgiveness is not admitting defeat, showing weakness, or saying that what happened was okay. It also isn't admitting that what happened is our fault or that it didn't matter. If we're hurt by someone, it matters. If that hurt changes us in some way, then it's become a crucial part of our lives.

Forgiveness is hard; that's the truth. But there's no way around it if we want freedom from the pain associated with this relationship.

We may think that by not forgiving our partner we're causing them to suffer or teaching them an important lesson or making them somehow “pay the price” for their actions. That's not how forgiveness works.

Resisting forgiveness is like locking ourselves in our own self-imposed prison. We keep ourselves locked in ambiguity and anger by withholding forgiveness from our partners. Clients often tell me that they want to heal from past relationships, and yet they resist or want to skip over forgiving. No one else can really release us from the prison, because we're the holder of the only keys. Forgiveness is the choice we make to free ourselves.

Holding onto past resentments keeps us from being able to move on with our lives in a healthy way. Past resentments are like a heavy weight that we carry with us that makes our journey slower and much more difficult than it needs to be. We can choose to put that weight down anytime we want.

## **Forgiveness is for *You***

Forgiveness is about *your* freedom:

It's about gaining freedom from your painful thoughts.

It's about gaining freedom from the heaviness weighing you down.

It's about gaining freedom from the anger and pain.

Forgiveness is about gaining freedom from attempting to change or control your partner.

Forgiveness is about gaining freedom from unintentionally sabotaging new relationships by making him or her pay for the sins of this broken relationship.

Forgiveness is for you. It's not ABOUT your spouse and it's not FOR them.

### **Our Journey is Our Job**

Most people don't hurt others intentionally. And if they do, they're likely in a very hurting place themselves. Healthy people don't hurt other people, only hurting people hurt other people.

When we withhold forgiveness in an effort to teach someone a lesson or get them to transform their ways, we're trying to change and control that person. We're trying to live their journey for them and, quite frankly, that's not our job.

Our job is to experience our own journey and to become the highest expression of ourselves as individuals, to show up in love and enjoy life. We're supposed to feel good. We're supposed to enjoy the ride. We end up resenting the ride and making each piece incredibly difficult when we choose to carry that heavy weight around with us.

Whenever we attempt to live someone else's journey for them, we're not present and engaged in our own journey. We're not showing up fully for ourselves in our own lives.

### **Why It's Worth the Effort**

Forgiveness is a critically important part of your next steps in deciding to exit the relationship. Whatever we don't, can't, or won't forgive will be the very things that keep us stuck and keep us from creating the life and loving relationships we really want.

Here's why: If we make the choice to stay stuck and carry around resentments from this broken relationship, we continue to attract that same type of energy into our lives.

We continue to attract the exact things we don't want, the same types of hurtful relationship experiences, over and over again, with different people. That negative energy becomes a magnet for more negative energy to come directly to us in a variety of forms. We will draw out that resentful energy from our spouse, making it incredibly difficult to separate peacefully. We will attract betrayal at work, through friendships, from family members, and most certainly from future loves.

To compound that, the more we repeat the story of the betrayal or pain we experienced over and over in our minds, the more energetic momentum we create. That momentum attracts more people who will wrong us, bringing us proof that our painful belief is true ... and keeping us stuck.

### **Seeing the Innocence**

I am a big believer in the fact that we're all just doing the best we can based upon where we're at on each of our respective journeys. We don't always handle everything perfectly – or even gracefully – but we did the best we could based upon what we knew and how we were mentally and emotionally at that time.

So did he (that rule holds true for your spouse as well).

Just because I couldn't feel my ex-husband's love for me in our marriage does not mean that he didn't love me as best as he could.

Even though I was the one made the decision to leave my marriage, that doesn't mean that I'm a bad person. Confused.....exhausted.....lonely, maybe; but not a bad person.

When we can release the thoughts that our partner should have been anyone other than who he was, or that he should have done something different than what he did, seeing the innocence in their actions, as well as our own, becomes a little easier...a little softer...a little lighter.

### **Loving, Accepting, and Forgiving Ourselves**

The work of forgiveness begins by going within. Because it is only once we can love, accept, and forgive ourselves that we're able to love, accept, and forgive everyone else.

Maybe you overlooked something you shouldn't have.

Maybe you tried to convince yourself you could make the unworkable work.

Maybe you stayed too long in a relationship out of fear of being alone.

Maybe you were afraid to tell him what you needed.

Maybe you stayed for the children.

But you did those things because you wanted love. You wanted to love and be loved in return. You wanted your marriage to work. Your role in what happened came from a pure place.

It's time that you finally forgive yourself:

Forgive yourself for not knowing what you didn't know.

Forgive yourself for not seeing what you didn't see.

Forgive yourself for abandoning your heart and/or your needs and/or your voice.

Forgive yourself for what you overlooked.

Forgive yourself for not telling yourself the truth.

Forgive yourself for not telling the whole truth to your spouse.

Forgive yourself for thinking you could change him.

Forgive yourself for not asking questions because you didn't want to hear the answers.

Forgive yourself for all of it.

You can't unlearn what you've learned. So, in the words of the late Dr. Maya Angelou, "*Once you know better, you do better.*" You'll do better next time, because now you know something you didn't know before. And once you know something, you can't un-know it.

### **Forgiving Your Spouse**

To begin forgiving the one you once loved, it's important to give a name to the hurt.

What do they need forgiveness from?

He / She should have / shouldn't have \_\_\_\_\_.  
(what)

*To forgive our partners, you have to be able to see a deeper truth.* If you were able to remove all preconceptions about what you think is right or wrong (lying, cheating, leaving, etc.), would you still believe that painful thought you wrote above?

If you believe the premise that we're all doing the best we can with where we are on the journey, can you see how someone who you were in a relationship with, one that didn't work out, was simply in a less evolved place on their own journey?

If you have no way of knowing what that soul's journey is, how can you possibly know that they shouldn't have done what they did? Maybe that was a part of their path. Maybe there was a lesson they needed to learn.

Anytime you believe that someone should do something other than what they're doing, you're causing yourself suffering.

Continue digging into all the painful hurts, one-by-one, giving each of them a name so they can be released, until you see a little bit of light shine through. That light is a little more truth, a little more love, and a little more grace. That light may not come bounding through and immediately fill the room, but it may just get a little brighter each day.

Allow this process to unfold.

Allow the hurt to soften.

Allow light the opportunity to provide some warmth.

This is how you free yourself from all the pain of the past.

This is how you don't continue to carry baggage or pain from this relationship into the next.

This is how you create a future that looks dramatically different than the past.

## **Forgiveness in Action**

I usually host a free teaching call once a month on various topics. As part of my last book launch, I held a free class on forgiveness. It's a universal topic that so many of us struggle with. There were probably 50 people on the call and at the end of the class, I offered to work through the process of forgiveness with one person, so that everyone could see forgiveness in action. I used the powerful coaching tools I've learned from [The Work by Byron Katie](#).

A woman who I'll call Susan spoke up at the end of this teaching call and shared her pain from her last broken relationship. She felt as though her boyfriend of six years deserted her during a time when she really needed him. Susan had been having some health issues and was looking forward to having her partner's love and support; apparently he wasn't able to provide that to her. She took that personally and was deeply hurt, feeling abandoned and alone.

The painful thought she worked was, *Jim shouldn't have deserted me.*

The Work consists of 4 questions and some turnarounds:

1. *Is it true?*

2. *Can you absolutely know that it's true?*
3. *How do you treat yourself when you think that thought? How do you treat him when you think that thought?*
4. *Who would you be without that thought?*

Susan's story of how Jim should have been there for her was deeply entrenched, so she answered the first 2 questions as *yes*. The painful thought that *Jim shouldn't have deserted me* was, it felt true.

When she would think the thought: *"Jim shouldn't have deserted me,"* she felt incredibly sad, didn't sleep or eat and the self-talk became pretty destructive. She also was pretty hateful towards Jim when she would think the thought that *Jim shouldn't have deserted me*.

Without that painful thought, even if everything else was the same, Susan said she would be lighter, more open, more confident and more loving.

But at this point, Susan still wasn't ready to release the thought. After all, she had been carrying it for a while. She believed it was an undisputable fact.

When we flipped the thought around to its opposite: *"Jim should have deserted me,"* and looked for evidence of its truth was where the breakthrough took place for her.

We call this new "practice" thought, a "turnaround."

When I asked for evidence of the thought: *"Jim should have deserted me,"* she resisted a bit, but managed to come up with a few pieces of evidence. But then I asked her, *"Is there any possibility that Jim should have deserted you out of self-preservation?"* There was a long silence. Susan broke down in tears. The truth had landed for her. *"Yes,"* she said, *"Jim is a war veteran. Seeing me in the situation I was in was simply too much for him to handle. I can see that now."*

By the end of that call, she was asking me if I thought it would be okay if she assisted Jim in getting some help for PTSD. She no longer resented him or blamed him, she found compassion for him.

When we're willing to ask and answer some of the difficult questions of our lives and our relationships, we unlock the keys to our own prison door.

## Reflective Questions:

- What do I need to forgive myself for?
- What do I need to forgive my spouse or partner for?

- If I have no way of knowing what his soul's journey is, can I absolutely know that he shouldn't have done all that he did (or didn't do)?

# Chapter 18: Our Fire Within

*"Ecstasy is your birthright."*

~ Danielle LaPorte #Truthbomb

Elizabeth Lesser calls him the Shaman Lover. Katherine Woodward Thomas refers to this experience as the Lightning Bolt moment. For me, it was The Awakening.

As you know, I married my first husband for safety. He packed his lunch every day, ironed his clothes on Sunday for the week ahead, and said *please* and *thank you*.

I distracted myself with my career and put my marriage on auto pilot.

I did all the things I was supposed to do and had all the things I was supposed to have.

But I was slowly dying inside. I had no passion in my life. My fire was almost completely extinguished and by the time my marriage ended, only a few small embers remained.

So, when Michael came into my life, I couldn't seem to turn away for the heat that fire provided. Michael brought to life a fire and passion in me that I didn't know existed.

But the person or situation that awakens us is never as important as the awakening itself. It's the awakening that's important.

## **Truly, Madly, Deeply**

If you simply wanted a warm body next to you, then you probably wouldn't have determined that you're in the wrong marriage. If you're of the belief that anyone will do, then there are plenty of men that will play that role.

When I left my marriage and got awakened, I began to refer to the kind of love I was looking for as *Big Love*. I wanted a deep, intimate, soulful connection. I wanted a kind of love that felt both easy and nurturing, as well as passionate and exciting. I wanted to love and to be loved truly, madly and deeply; otherwise, what was the point?

So that became the lens through which I began to view my life.

The men I allowed into my heart had to at least have truly, madly, deeply potential.

The friendships and people I surrounded myself with needed to be deeply connected and meaningful.

The way I created and shared my gifts in the world needed to align with my soul.

This didn't happen overnight, in fact, it has taken years. And it is still something I use as a barometer when I am intentional about who I share my time and energy with.

I've been in the place where I got disconnected from my husband, had a crowd of friends and was busy with things that filled my time but not my soul. I know what that feels like and I'm not going back there.

### **No Going Back**

Fire is representative of life. If we're alive, we have passion inside of us, even if it sometimes goes unexpressed.

But just because we're alive doesn't mean we're really living.

Just showing up each day doesn't make us engaged in our own lives.

And just because things are happening around us doesn't make life meaningful.

Hiding our dreams and desires is the equivalent of existing through life rather than starring in our lives.

We were not created to live small, inconsequential lives of simply going through the motions and slowly dying. Our fires were not created to be smothered.

When oxygen reaches our fires, things inside us get stirred up and we're no longer willing to live with a lid on. Once our lives go from seeing in black and white to seeing everything in full color, we can't go back to black and white again.

We begin to wake up by questioning and challenging the biggest pieces of our lives: our relationships, our careers, and our deeply held beliefs. Suddenly, we want all pieces of our life to begin to light up and overflow with abundance. We want to live life fully and completely, breathing life into all of our feelings, passions, and sensations. Sometimes we can get a bit rebellious and carefree in the process, all for another hit of oxygen.

### **We Are All of Those Things**

As women we are told, both directly and indirectly, that stirring up our passions and feeding our desires is wrong, selfish, and, in some circles, even sacrilege.

We are the caretakers and the nurturers.

We are the compassionate guardians and the devoted mothers.

We are all those things.

But we are also the lovers and the fighters.

We are also the driven professionals and the passionate creatives.

We are the open heart, the courageous stars of our own lives, and the powerful, soulful, divine lights.

When we feed our fires by discovering and honoring our desires, there is a light within that will shine brightly. Our embers will burn and we'll be more able to live with heart and wholeness – open and authentic, vulnerable and strong.

Fire isn't a bad thing. Fire is life. Claim your fire and fan the flame.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- What is one desire that I'm ready to claim?
- What are three words that will describe how I want my next love to feel?
- What is a way to fan the flame and stir more passion into my life?

# Chapter 19: What Now?

*"Some of us think holding on is strong; but it is letting go."*

~ Hermann Hesse

There are plenty of coaches out there that can give you the very pragmatic advice of what the next 15 steps of your life should entail: contact a lawyer (at least meet with the best ones in town, so that even if you choose to not use them, your husband can't if you've already met with them first), determine where you're going to live, get plenty of rest, take care of yourself, start working out so that you feel strong...it shouldn't surprise you by now that I'm not going to take that angle.

As a truth-telling Love Coach, I'm not going to lie to you: going through a separation / divorce / dissolution of any kind is painful. You will waiver daily between feeling free and excited about what lies ahead and feeling lonely and scared shitless. When I left my marriage to my ex-husband, I was perpetually exhausted, battled with depression and numbed myself like a champ by going out with friends nearly every night of the week until all I could do was come home and pass out in my 600 square foot furnished apartment.

But there's no logical reason why my experience has to be your experience (*particularly because I'm teaching you all the things I wish I knew then*).

If you have children, be so incredibly grateful for the beautiful distraction they will be from the ambiguity of your life while you tend to your needs and lick your wounds. Your children will keep you moving forward, they will keep you busy as hell and they will keep you laughing, even when you feel like crying.

This experience may be incredibly difficult for many months; but so is staying in a relationship for decades that doesn't feed your soul.

## **Take Responsibility for the Energy You Bring**

The energy that you bring to this relationship over the next several months will either make you or break you. Each day may present some new challenges and each day you are given the opportunity to show up in a peaceful, present and loving way or you can show up in fear, worry and revenge.

One will help you maintain not only your sanity, but also your groundedness and composure; the other will give you an ulcer.

One will allow your children to see you respect yourself and honor your needs, the other will be an audition for a new reality TV show.

One will help you discover the part of you that wants to look a little deeper and learn something from this experience, the other will keep you stuck repeating the same experience in love time and again.

This process has the potential to bring out the ugliest parts of you – those scared, angry and insecure parts. Each day, you get to choose what energy you bring to the dismantling of this relationship and while your partner may not mirror your energy, he also won't be able to steal your joy.

The energy you bring – much like forgiveness – is a gift that you give yourself during this time. It's not for him; it's for you. Love yourself enough to be intentional about the energy you bring to this experience.

## **There is No Winner**

We are brought up to believe that in order for someone to win, there must be someone that loses. There's not an athletic game today that's played where there's not a distinct winner and loser (except for the occasional tie). So, it's understandable why we instinctively go into the dismantling of our marriage as if it's a battle with a clear winner and a distinct loser. We think that if he gets more, then somehow we get less.

Here's the bad news and the good news: In a divorce, there is no winner...which means there is no loser either. So, here's my advice:

*Get Clear about What's Important:* Not everything is important. Not everything has to be the battleground. Try not to react to what he wants or why he wants it; instead just get crystal clear about what's important to you and then only pay attention to (give your energy to) those things.

*Be intentional:* Set an intention for the divorce. Understand what you want to experience and when you come out the other side of it, how you want to feel about it. Absolutely none of it will be sunshine and rainbows, but maybe it can feel like wide open space and freedom.

*Let Your Lawyer Earn His / Her Money:* Throughout this process, there may be battles that are worth fighting. And when that time comes, let the lawyers do what you paid them to do: fight your battles for you. Tell them what you want, provide them whatever you need to provide them in terms of supporting documentation and let them earn their money. Don't try to control or manipulate and don't lose sleep or drive yourself crazy going over the *what ifs* that you have no control of anyway.

*A Word on Self-Preservation:* My client, Kelly, has been going through a pretty typical divorce – some days her soon-to-be ex is fair and rational, other days he's hurt and unreasonable. My client (of course) has attempted to be peaceful and rational throughout the process.

One day, she's in the shower and her ex walks into the bathroom to pick something up and lingers a bit. He doesn't knock on the bathroom door, he just barges right in. He doesn't let her know he's coming to the house in advance and he just let himself in the front door as if nothing has changed. Except he didn't even come into the bathroom when she was showering while they were together and happily married.

Needless to say, Kelly was shocked and a little afraid. Within a few days, she had the locks changed on the house. Sometimes, the actions we take are simply for self-preservation.

### **A Word Your Divorce Attorney Doesn't Want to Hear You Utter**

There is a word that you should never say in front of your attorney, but you should absolutely put to good use throughout this process. That word is *surrender*.

Popular opinion would tell you that *surrender* is synonymous with giving up or weakness; but that's not the truth. The truth is that when you can consciously surrender to a situation that you have very little control of anyway, you take back all your power.

I learned about the concept of surrender from Judith Orloff, M.D. through her book *The Ecstasy of Surrender*. In it she says, "*It's difficult to be powerful and tense at the same time.*"

As a card-carrying recovering control-freak, I think about surrender as if I'm floating in a raft on a fast-moving river. I would be more than a little bit crazy to think that I could place my raft in the water and paddle like crazy upstream; it would be a lot of work and not terribly successful. I would be exhausted and I wouldn't get very far.

You almost have no choice but to put your raft in the water, get in and follow the flow downstream. There will be rocks. There will be undercurrents and challenges that take you by surprise. But the alternative, trying to change the flow of the river to go in the direction we want it to, is futile. When you surrender to the flow, you end up at your destination safe and secure, whole, confident and powerful. Let the river take you. Let yourself influence your direction, without attempting to control the current. Let the river take you without making it mean that you're any less powerful.

Surrendering to the flow doesn't mean you won't get batted around a bit. It doesn't mean that you're not strong enough to paddle upstream. It does mean you'll be much more powerful and you will get further, faster.

### **The Paperwork and the Heart Work**

If your marriage is ending, understand that the process of a divorce is so much more than the legal paperwork involved. It is a dissolving of a dream that once existed and it is the releasing of a soul you once loved – maybe still love in many ways.

When my first husband and I went through our dissolution, there were a few times when I was hateful towards him. As I said, it can bring out the worst in us. But in the end I had nothing but compassion for both of us.

In order for me to do the work of releasing any resentments I held, I had to not only release him, but I had to wish him well. I was able to finally release my husband (and much of my guilt) when I was able to genuinely wish for him that he would find someone that loved and adored him the way he needed and deserved to be loved; in a way that I could not. When he got remarried recently, I was truly, honestly and deeply happy for both of them.

### **You're Being Guided**

Okay, I'm only going to get a little woo on you... indulge me for a moment.

I think we can see everything as a sign or everything as a coincidence. We can choose that everything has meaning or nothing has meaning. I'm on the side that everything is a sign and everything has meaning – as long as we're paying attention in our lives.

You know those synchronicities that you call *coincidences*? You know how a thought or a song comes to you at the exact time that you need it? You know how you'll pick up your phone at exactly 11:11? To you that may be all coincidence; to me it's all a gift meant for you.

You have help. You have the wind of your Masters, loved ones and angels at your back. Trust that help. Ask them to carry what you cannot. You have more power and support than you know and they can do even more than you can think of as possible. But they will only come when called upon.

I can only tell you from my own experience that this is true. I didn't really understand this concept for most of my life. I always believed in the idea of angels, but I didn't have a concept of how they impacted or guided my daily life. If this is new to you and you're starting to think I'm a crazy person, just begin communicating with your angels and inviting them into your life. Ask them for a sign and then pay attention. Be playful about it. They know who you are, they know what you need, and they cannot wait to help.

## Reflective Questions:

- What is the energy that I want to intentionally bring to this next step?
- What is one fear that's been rattling around in my head that I'm ready to surrender?
- What is a wish for my partner that I can sincerely set at this time?
- Am I willing to ask my angels and guides to show me a sign that they're present in my life?

**Section IV:**

*The Answer to Every Problem is Always... Love*

# Chapter 20: Truth & Self-Love

*“To love yourself as you are is a miracle. And to seek yourself is to have found yourself, for now. And now is all we have, and love is who we are.”*

~ Anne Lamott

The room was dark with only a few candles lit. The energy of the room was peaceful and accepting. The room wraps around you like a big hug as you enter it. I had been in and out of a meditative state for about 45 minutes when my Reiki Master asked me to begin taking some deep breaths to bring me back. After several deep breaths, I was once again aware of the serenity that surrounded me and protected me.

Tanisha is not just a Reiki Master, she also provides intuitive guidance. So, when I'm done with my Reiki sessions, she usually talks to me about what my angels and guides want me to know. This week's message wasn't a surprise.

Throughout the past several weeks, I had been in production mode. I was writing this book in a matter of weeks, I was planning retreats, creating new free calls, implementing new functionality on my web site and re-vamping my communications. This was all in addition to meeting with my clients and writing my weekly blogs. I was getting a great deal done, but none of it was inspired. There were moments when I felt excited about all that was happening and all that was being born into creation, but mostly these babies were born from sheer will power.

*“The more you have to do, the more time you have to take for yourself.”* Tanisha informed me, *“The busier your day, the greater the commitment should be to a daily spiritual practice that feeds your soul.”*

That sounded reasonable. Except that when I have a lot to do, the very thing I feel as though I have less of is time. So, when I'm at my busiest is when I'm supposed to find the most amount of time just for me? How does that work?

Here's how:

It's the difference between cranking something out through will, force and hard work and creating a sacred space for allowing what wants to be created to be created. It's the difference between getting shit done and inspired action.

When I take the time at the beginning of my day to feed my own soul and attend to the divine within me, all the work I do for the rest of the day is inspired and easy. My day flows and I can literally get more done in less time. The busier I am, the more I need some time to be still, pay attention to the wisdom of my body, and listen for guidance.

For me that looks like saying a prayer as soon as I wake-up, but before my eyes open. After letting the puppies out and giving them a bone to occupy themselves, I spend 15 minutes in stillness and likely a guided meditation (assuming those puppies allow me to stay still).

If the horizon of my day is crazier than I would like then I will make that time in stillness closer to 30 minutes.

And if my day is crazy, insane, how-in-the-world-will-I-get-it-all-done, then there is meditation, reading a chapter from a spiritual book, and maybe even adding to my gratitude list or writing a few morning pages. I also attend yoga as often as I possibly can. Yoga is my go-to for keeping me grounded in my body and connected to Source.

I've tried it the other way for a long time. Because it's known to me, it's my default plan. But, if I want to live intentionally and if I want my clients to find the space for themselves to allow more light into their lives, I actually have to practice what I preach. So, I sit in stillness – even when I'm not good at it and my mind is wandering, even when I don't have time and especially when I'm feeling the weight of all that's in front of me. I do it because the other way – cranking it out – simply isn't worth the consequences for my life.

If your version of a daily spiritual practice looks more like playing with the dogs, having a cup of tea in the sun room, going for a morning walk or just intentionally inserting joy into your day – that's perfect. You get to decide what taking time for you looks like. And as long as it feels good and nurtures your soul, that's perfect.

## **Finding Self-Love**

Finding self-love isn't something that comes easily for most of us and when we lose it, it's not something we can pull off the shelf. I speak with women every week that struggle with confidence, self-esteem and self-love – all cousins to one another.

Each of these women have a vision for their life that requires them to be more courageous than they are today. Each of these women know intellectually that being more compassionate with themselves will help them get out of their own way. And each of these women know that in order to find the love they desire in their hearts, self-love is a requirement.

At times, when people have their initial introductory call with me, they think I have a magic bullet of some sort – or some pixie-dust I can sprinkle over them to remove them from the pain and help them love themselves a little bit more. Although I like to think the work I do is pretty magical and filled with miracles, unfortunately, there's no pixie dust involved.

Self-love is a daily walk, a choice we make to choose love over fear and compassion over judgment.

It's the daily choice to set healthy boundaries to protect ourselves from well-intentioned, but toxic people.

It's expressing our needs, listening to what our bodies crave, and creating sacred space for our minds to wander and wonder.

It's asking for help, but not staying stuck in our story.

It's allowing ourselves to sit in the shit for a bit, but not giving ourselves permission to stay there.

It's letting everyone around us off the hook from changing so that we can feel better.

It's forgiving ourselves again and again and again and again.

### **A Whole New Way to Think about Self-Love**

The lesson I've learned about self-love through one of my favorite spiritual teachers, Abraham-Hicks, is that self-love doesn't have to be just love of self; it can be expressing the part of you that is loving.

The path to self-love is by being the soul who loves: who lives in gratitude and appreciation for all the simple things surrounding them. When you're the one that's loving the people, the experiences, the miraculous creations that surround our lives on any given day, you can't help but become a more loving person. And when you become more loving, that love that you express out into the world will begin to include you as well. Becoming more loving is like coming back home to your own heart.

Thinking about self-love in this way is the difference between wanting love to be pointed at each of us and just embracing our innate nature to love others. When we stop looking for love to be directed towards us, it opens up space and gives us the freedom to simply be love. Because, in the end, to love and be loved is all we're here to do.

### **Self-Love is Never Allowing Anyone to Dim Your Light**

I had left my marriage and I was living in a furnished 600 square foot apartment. I had been on my own for several months by now, but clearly I wasn't any happier. I was fumbling around trying to find my way in the dark and I gave my heart away to someone who proceeded to play with it and shatter it to pieces. It was a Sunday afternoon, following a long weekend of constant numbing in order to avoid the difficult questions of my life. I couldn't pull myself off the couch that afternoon, and I cried what felt like a river of tears.

I was fortunate enough to have my very wise and loving best friend, Traci, by my side, speaking truth to me. She asked me a question that I remember so clearly: *"Sweetie...don't you see? He's stealing your light."*

Self-love is never allowing anyone or anything to dim your light.

## Reflective Questions:

- What is something I can love and appreciate in my life today?
- What does my version of a daily spiritual practice look like?
- What are 50 things that bring me joy? Declare: I am willing to insert at least one of those things into my day every day – intentionally, lovingly, deliberately.

# Chapter 21: Truth & Intimacy

*“To be fully seen by somebody, then, to be loved anyhow – that is a human offering that can border on miraculous.”*

~ Elizabeth Gilbert, *Committed*

The idea of intimacy can be frightening and yet, our souls long for it. In a culture where most of us only put the great things about our lives on display for others through social media, we’ve been led to believe that everyone else’s life is picture-perfect, but that somehow ours is not. So we don’t talk about those things, we avoid those conversations and each day do our best to live up to and into the mask of a life we’ve created. And that mask leaves us feeling empty and alone.

But we need each other. We need human connection and support. We need to be seen and known, valued and heard. It is only through the doorway of vulnerability that we can ever have an intimate connection with another. We have to tell the truth. We have to accept what is true for other people’s lives. We have to know what is true for ourselves and our own lives.

## **An Intimate Relationship with Yourself**

If you’re brave enough to take the time to get still, listen to and trust your inner guidance, you’re going to learn a lot; mostly about yourself.

You will get a sense of who you are. You will have a knowing about your own well-being. And you will learn that every answer you ever need lies inside of you.

To know yourself at an intimate level and to accept, love and forgive all that you find within is a prerequisite to having an intimate, soulful relationship with another. If you’re too scared to look within and own what’s there, you won’t be brave enough to share that part of your heart with anyone else. And not doing so leaves you hiding and hustling, attempting to be someone you’re not and endlessly falling short of your own expectations.

To know yourself at an intimate level is to be in touch with how you feel and to know that you have some control over how you feel.

To know yourself at an intimate level means that you can see the innocence in both yourself and others because you have realized that we're all just doing the best we can with where we're each at on our own journeys.

To know yourself intimately is to find compassion and kindness for the imperfect perfection of your life and your heart. You will have realized that no one else can make you feel whole or erase the pains from your past. That job is yours and yours alone.

To know yourself intimately is to realize that you are love. And you are divine. And that is a heart and a soul and a truth worth sharing.

### **Our Intimate Relationships**

There's a tremendous difference between affection and connection, as well as between sex and intimacy. So, when I speak of intimacy, I'm not just talking about physical intimacy; I'm also referring to the intimate connection between two people when they're both safe to be seen and experienced fully.

My client, Elaine, had been married once before and had a few important and long-term relationships in her life. She's smart, strong, courageous, and she's well aware of how she has contributed to the creation of her experiences she's had in love so far. For example, Elaine stayed in a relationship for nearly 10 years where she subjugated her needs and what she wanted.

In Elaine's most recent relationship, they were first friends with and then fell deeply in love. She told me she was the truest to herself that she had ever been inside of a relationship; she allowed her goofy humor to shine through, she put down her walls and shared pieces of her heart that she had never shared before and most importantly she really liked who she was inside of that relationship.

Although that relationship didn't last, Elaine learned a powerful truth about herself: When she allowed herself to be fully seen and experienced, being completely honest, vulnerable, and intimate with another person – it felt really good. It was different than every other relationship she had ever had. That made the breakup of this relationship painful, but now she knew she was capable of connecting with someone on an intimate level. She knows what that feels like and now the bar has been raised quite a bit for her next relationship.

Several years ago, I was watching an awards show where a woman was giving an acceptance speech for an award she had received for her work. She thanked all the usual people that surrounded her and helped her achieve all that she had. But at the end of her

speech, in front of thousands of people and probably millions of television viewers, she looked right at her husband in the crowd and said, *“Thank you for seeing me even when I didn’t see myself.”* She paused for a few powerful seconds in silence, still looking into his eyes, said *“thank you”* and exited the stage. Tears immediately came to my eyes. There might have been millions of people witnessing it, but in that moment there was just the two of them – open and honest, intimate and vulnerable.

Seeing ourselves is seeing the truth. Allowing ourselves to be seen is a vision of courage. Being seen by another is a miracle.

## Reflective Questions:

- When was the last time I felt an intimate connection with someone I loved?
- Who in my life knows my heart at the deepest level? How does it feel to be with them?
- What is one thing I am willing to do today to know myself at a more intimate level? Am I willing to get still? Am I willing to ask the question, *“Who am I?”* and wait for the answer? Am I willing to see myself through a more compassionate lens?

# Chapter 22: Truth & Compassion

*“Ever has it been that love knows not its own depth until the hour of its separation.”*

~ Kahlil Gibran

When people are hurt and hearts are breaking, it can sometimes bring out the worst in us. When we choose to stay in a painful relationship without doing anything to make it better, it's easy to become resentful and angry. When we choose to leave a relationship, the emotions of resentment and jealousy, fear and loneliness take center stage.

As human beings on a planet that is constantly changing, we aren't terribly good at embracing change and trusting in the unknown. We like the security we feel when we believe that we can control the outcome.

But here's the thing....the world is spinning in 1040 mph, the sun came up this morning and it wasn't on your to-do list, and you started as the size of a pea in your mother's womb. Everything in this life is a miracle, every part of our lives is guided and every breath we take and lesson we learn is sacred. Besides our thoughts there's very little we can actually control, but there's so much well-being in which to place our trust. The Universe can handle this time of transition so much better than we can. God can dream a much bigger dream for our lives than we are capable of.

## **His Wounds**

You may be in pain right now.

He may be as well.

Sometimes when we're in pain, it's difficult to acknowledge the pain of our partner. We allow the depth of our pain to keep us from seeing his pain.

Maybe he not only let you down, but he didn't meet his own expectations.

Maybe he learned that he had to hide heart for most of his life for self-preservation.

Maybe he can't acknowledge his role in the relationship because of his own wounds; wounds that we may never fully know or understand.

That's the freedom of living in the unknown of our relationships. That's the power of loving people exactly as they are.

We believe things we don't understand.

We allow his journey even when it separates from ours.

We accept apologies we never get.

## Reflective Questions:

- What situation in my life feels like I'm hanging onto it for dear life? What problem do I have the death grip on right now? How can I hold that problem and its outcome a little more lightly?
- In what way can I practice more compassion? Towards myself? Towards my partner?
- What apology do I need to accept that I never received?

# Chapter 23: Telling the Truth

*"Because I have a choice, I choose love."*

~ Deepak Chopra

Nancy's husband is hurting. He's angry and irrational. He shows up at their home every few days and picks fights. His temper can be intimidating. She doesn't know exactly where he's sleeping or what's filling his days. He's no longer helping around the house and hasn't been in contact with their daughter. Their 20-year relationship has been unraveling for a while.

Although anyone else might have thrown in the towel long ago and pointed the blame back at her husband, Nancy calls me and tells me that during our next session, she'd like to better understand her role in how she got to this point in their relationship. She wants to understand how she contributed to where they've come to be in this relationship.

This is why I refer to my clients as being brave. It takes courage to ask the questions about our role in our experiences and be willing to take responsibility for that.

In every relationship, we play a role in the creation of that experience. When you're in a painful relationship, although it may feel easier to only look at your partners' role of what they either did or didn't do, it keeps you stuck. Even if you leave, it keeps you attracting the same kind of people in a different pair of pants and the same type of experiences into your life.

Your opportunity for creating the kind of relationship experience you want in love resides in your willingness to understand your role. No one is implying that it's all your fault or that you somehow deserved poor treatment. But the moment that you're willing to become *compassionately curious* about how you contributed to how you got to this place in your relationship is the moment you can create a future that looks dramatically different than your past.

- *Maybe you were far more worried about making the other person happy than making yourself happy.*
- *Maybe you pretended as though how your spouse treated you was okay, even when it didn't feel good.*
- *Maybe you have realized that you got married for the wrong reasons.*

- *Maybe you thought he would change.*
- *Maybe you got caught-up in trying to be the perfect mother, that you neglected your marriage.*
- *Maybe you convinced yourself that what you had with another was “enough,” even when you knew in your heart it wasn’t what you really wanted or needed in a relationship.*

What amount of your experience had to do with the role you played? Maybe you only need to claim ten percent of what happened. That’s enough. Any amount you can claim is absolutely enough.

### **Stay in Your Lane**

Through times of evolution and transition in our lives, it’s incredibly important to remain in our own business, nurture our own journey and manage our own thoughts. Although it’s easy to fall into the drama of trying to understand why other people do what they do or what they’re thinking, it’s a fruitless effort that only keeps you stuck and frustrated.

Here’s a phrase you can use when you find yourself in somebody else’s business: *Stay in your lane, Cutie Pie* (I added the *Cutie Pie* so that you’re speaking to yourself lovingly).

*How could he not understand my perspective?* You may never understand. Stay in your lane, Cutie Pie.

*What kind of person does he think I am? He should know me better than that.* Not your business. Stay in your lane, Cutie Pie.

*You’ll never believe what he did yesterday!* That’s his journey and one that you can’t control. Your journey is enough. Stay in your lane, Cutie Pie.

### **Telling the Truth and Making Commitments**

Keep speaking truth to yourself and seeking what feels right and true for you and your life at this time. You will know truth when you feel it. When you get still and quiet long enough, you will sense what is true for you because it will feel like a calm inner knowing. It will feel more like a gently flowing stream within your body than white water rapids.

In order to create a different experience for yourself – whether you’re remaining in this relationship or moving on – it’s time you made some commitments to yourself. Commitments equip you to create the life and love life you desire for yourself. Commitments help you to no longer fear the unknown. Commitments light a path to clarity and help you get back on track when you wander off.

Complete these sentences for yourself:

*I promise and commit to myself that I will ...*

*I promise and commit to myself that I will never again ...*

*I promise and commit to myself that next time I will ...*

Keep making as many of these commitment statements for yourself until it feels complete. Keep these statements handy, even read through them once a day. They will keep you honest, focused, and moving forward toward the life and love you desire.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- What was my role in the creation of my relationship thus far?
- What feels most like love for me right now?
- Is this painful thought I’m thinking actually true?...or does it just feel true?
- What commitments am I willing to make to myself?

# Chapter 24: What I Couldn't Know Then, But I'm so Grateful to Know Now

*"So what if you're not young anymore; you have so much more skill now, and so much less fear."*

~ Marianne Williamson

I coach women over 40 years old almost exclusively. By the time we're 40, we've lived through some life experiences that have left us yes, a little older, but certainly wiser as a result.

We know there's very little passion in taking the safe approach and very little joy in playing small to make others more comfortable.

We're no longer interested in the fairy tale; we want what's real.

We've stopped caring about the princess wedding dress and the white picket fence; we want passion and connection, intimacy and adventure.

We no longer look for other people to erase our pain or make us complete; we know that the only path to love is through ourselves.

We love differently in the middle of our lives than we did when we were young.

We love with fire more than with fear.

We love with both peace and passion.

We can now love with honesty and openness, without doubt and hesitation.

We know more about who we are and we're unafraid to let people see us.

The energy we bring to a relationship is different because it flows from a place of security and confidence.

**Nothing Changes Until We Do**

I spent years thinking that other people should change; they should do or be something other than what they actually are so that I could approve, be happier, become more secure, or less afraid. I spent decades in a soul-sucking career waiting for circumstances to change so that I could grow, get promoted, make more money, or finally be content.

But the only path to create or inspire change within our own experiences is when we have the courage to change ourselves. We can interrupt thought patterns or release long-held beliefs. We can become more compassionate and forgiving – first to ourselves. We can become less fearful and less judgmental. We can love and accept people exactly as they are, while still setting healthy boundaries that honoring our needs. We can become more present, more intentional, more open, more spontaneous, more honest, more trusting, and more loving.

Change has to originate within us in order to manifest into a future experience that looks different than your past. And when you can tell the truth to yourself about what you're willing to change for the larger, broader, more important goal of creating the life and loving relationships you really want, miracles begin to occur.

### **Love is a verb.**

Love is an action we take.

It is a leap we make.

It is a walk in faith.

Love is not a gift, a favor nor an obligation. We don't do it for the object of our love; we do it because *we can't not love*.

To stop loving is to cut off the channel to our soul.

Love, at its very best, is for us.

Love in its most pure form is simply demonstrated through us.

At our core, love is all we are. And it's all we're here to do.

Not to *receive it*; but to do it. To be the one who loves. To be the vessel through which it flows.

Once we choose to become love, we will never have a shortage of it in our lives.

## **Reflective Questions:**

- In what ways do I love differently now than I did when I was younger?
- What skills or knowledge have I acquired about love over the years?
- What fears have I set aside?
- Finish this sentence: Love is...

If you need a guide for this journey – coming to YOUR answer for your heart, your life and your marriage, you can [apply for a complimentary Truth & Clarity Session](#) to see if there's a fit for us to work together.

# Acknowledgements

My source of inspiration and the reason I wake-up every morning is to love and honor my beautiful and brave clients:

The women who want an intimate, connected and lasting love.

The women that want to be free from heartbreak and pain.

The women who lost themselves and their voice in their relationships.

The women who invested in themselves and show up in a way they never have before.

The few brave men who trust me with their story and to be their guide in getting the love they desire and deserve.

The work we do together is sacred and profound and I have so much love for who you are and who you're becoming.

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# About The Author



Sharon Pope is a certified Master Life Coach and seven-time best-selling author on love and relationships. She is the Relationship Coach for anyone struggling in a lonely and disconnected marriage. If you're seeking confidence and clarity, I can help you fix your marriage or move forward without regret.

After going through a divorce and multiple failed and painful relationships, Sharon finally learned that finding love has so much more to do with the inner work of who we're becoming than the outer work of what we're doing.

Sharon has been published dozens of times in various publications, including the New York Times, msn.com, Mind Body Green, HuffPost and Thrive Global.

Sharon lives on the water in Florida, with the love of her life, her husband Derrick.

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