A helpful way of using this and every chart in this book is to draw a line for every entry with a point at each end (using a separate sheet of paper).

Plot your behavior at an end or center and notice where the majority of your responses fall. They may differ for each person in your life, e.g. poor boundaries with spouse, clear boundaries with parents, moderate boundaries with children.

All of this is information about where your struggle is, where your work needs to be, and where things are satisfactory.

8. INTIMACY

Mutual loving closeness in a committed relationship

I. Elements of True Intimacy

What we are able to offer once our ego is healthy:

1. An abundant inner source of self-nurturance so that we are not desperately needy for someone to depend on (as a child on a parent) or for someone to take care of (as a parent of a child).

2. Trust in ourselves to receive loyalty and handle betrayal. Adult relationships are not based on implicit trust (as parent-child relationships are) but on unconditional love which acknowledges human mutability.

3. The ability to give and to receive. "I get past my fears long enough to disclose my feelings and receive yours, to show affection—both sexually and non-sexually—and to receive yours."

4. Respect for ground rules regarding lifestyles, responsibilities, sex, and differing time/space needs.

5. Encouraging, fearless, and pleased acceptance of the other's unique needs, differences, development, and path.

6. An engaged focus on the other so that one genuinely listens to the other's feelings and concerns without the immediate need to tell one's own story.

7. A commitment to maintain the relationship during periods when one's needs are not being met, since the other is valued for one's inherent worth, not just for need fulfillment.

8. An ability to tolerate love and anger at the same time. "You can be angry at me and I will still love you. When I am angry at you, I still love you."

9. Ability to pass through the normal phases of relationship—from romance through conflict to commitment—with a love that matures within each vicissitude.

10. A commitment to an essential bond—an enduring "given" of mutuality—that weathers the stresses and crises of change. This bond is unconditional. If "someone else has come along" who is more attractive, more fun, "just right," it will be taken only as information about the charms of the new person or the deficits of the present relationship. It will not cause a break-up or lead to a new involvement.

The above ten elements describe unconditional love as it relates to intimate relationships.

II. Fears That Arise in Intimate Relationships

Primal fears arise in childhood that carry over into adult relationships:

- Fear of being abandoned and so losing the other; this makes us cling or be possessive of others.
- Fear of being engulfed and so losing oneself; this makes us run away or distance ourselves from others.

These are normal fears. Both arise in all of us—though one usually predominates in intimate relationships. It is only when these fears become so intense as to affect our judgment and behavior that they become problematic.

Adult relating is in the capacity to commit ourselves without being immobilized by the fear of abandonment if someone pulls too far away, or by the fear of engulfment if someone gets too close. It will seem as if these fears result directly from the behavior of our adult partner, but these are phantom fears. What is hurting us is gone but still stimulates. We are reacting to our own inner landscape, a landscape ravaged by archaic plunder that has never been

acknowledged, restored, or forgiven. Heidegger says it in a striking way: "The Dreadful has already happened."

Since fears of abandonment and engulfment are thus cellular reflexes, we are wise not to take our partner's display of them too personally. These fears are not rational so we cannot talk someone out of them or blame someone for them. Compassion from one partner and work to change by the other partner is the most effective combination. (The "work to change" is described later in this section.)

Actually, an adult cannot be abandoned, only left, cannot be engulfed, only crowded! Once we live in the present, things become so much more matter-of-fact and we drop the blame-filled judgments.

Fear of Abandonment	**Fear of Engulfment**
Fear of independence so that one:	*Fear of dependency so that one:*
Has trouble letting go when the other needs space	Has trouble making a commitment
Seeks maximum contact (clings)	Seeks more space (distances)
Is enmeshed or obsessive about the other's story	Takes the other for granted or is indifferent
Is caretaking of the other and not of oneself	Feels entitled to need fulfillment by the other
Always wants to give more (sense of never giving enough)	Construes giving as obligating or receiving as smothering
Goes along with others' ideas, plans, or timing	Needs to be in control, to make decisions, or to be right
Has no personal boundaries or bottom line for abuse	Has no tolerance of disloyalty or inadequacy

Copes with any conduct	Has rigid boundaries with no tolerance of error
Is addicted to the other	Seduces the other and then withholds
Needs constant reassurance that the other will stay	Needs the other to "stay put while I come and go at will"
Fears aloneness	Becomes anxious with extended togetherness
Rationalizes (makes excuses that enable coping)	Intellectualizes (thinks or explains away feelings)
Protects the other from the impact of one's own feelings	Avoids or minimizes one's own and the other's feelings
Shows fear, represses anger	Shows anger, represses fear
Distress in comings/goings	Distress in giving/receiving
Manifests clinging, closeness, and reaching out	Manifests coldness, rigidity, and distance

III. Working with Abandonment and Engulfment Fears

Sometimes we choose relationships that stimulate one or both of these fears.

Sometimes we choose relationships that allay these fears. A conscious adult will explore personal motives and choices and honestly admit them.

When a fear is *stimulated*, we get an opportunity to work through it or we become more entrenched in it—usually blaming our partner.

When a fear is *allayed*, we can feel safe enough to risk more openness or we can become complacent—expecting our partner to protect and insulate us.

You know a relationship matters to you in a healthy way when you are willing to act over the awkwardness of the small but scary steps that lead to change:

1. Notice which behavior of yours leads to problems for you or your partner. See through such excuses as: "This is how I am!" or "But I'm right." Acknowledge the fear or pain behind any behavior or attitude that makes smooth relating difficult. *All you need to know is that the relationship is not working as it is.* Cut through reasons, blame, and self-justification and admit the need for change. Such admission has healing power because it ends denial and attends to the truth.

2. Once you have become conscious of the most frequent fears that have arisen in one or more relationships, tell prospective or new partners about them, e.g. "I want to be intimate but I have to admit I become uncomfortable with a lot of bodily contact, except in sex"—or—"I notice you spend a lot of time with your friends. I will probably feel threatened by that because I easily feel abandoned—even when you assure me of your commitment."

You may be reluctant to share your agenda for fear of losing your partner. Declare this fear openly, too! Then two things will probably follow:

a. Your self-esteem will increase because of your integrity in self-disclosure in spite of the fear of loss.

b. You will find out the nature of your partner's commitment.

3. Intimacy fears tend to surface after the romantic phase of a relationship. Abandonment and engulfment issues create a new kind of negative excitement: fear and thrill at the same time. The adrenalin rush can be addicting and can lead to your doing things that *stir up* the fears. Admit to this whether or not you see how you do it. Paradoxically, by taking responsibility for the unconscious choice element in your drama, you are freed from it.

4. If you fear abandonment, let your partner go one more inch away each day and notice that you survive it. Reassurances rein-

force the fear. Live through one more episode of fear—or one more day of an episode—without asking your partner for a reassurance that he or she will stay with you or still loves you. This reinforces your independence.

5. If you fear engulfment, let your partner get one inch closer every day and notice how you can stand it (or may even enjoy it). Remember that one inch represents 100% progress the first time you allow it!

You may feel the strong need to be in control and make all the decisions in the relationship. On small decisions, alternate with your partner so that you make one choice and the partner makes the next. On larger decisions, negotiate so that both of you get something each of you wants every time.

6. To fear engulfment is to believe that closeness takes something away from you. Deal with this fear of *losing* yourself paradoxically by *freely giving* yourself. Make a self-disclosure, admit a vulnerability, or show a feeling. Thus *you stop losing by letting go.*

To fear abandonment is to dread being left alone. This is a fear not of loss of self but of gain of self-confrontation. Setting time aside for yourself daily means *choosing* the very thing you fear. This paradoxical reversal leads gradually to your enjoying your aloneness.

Since the fear is maintained by a sense of ourselves as victims, choice releases its grip. Jung describes the healing power of paradox in this way: "If there is a fear of falling, the only safety consists in deliberately jumping."

IV. Practical Skills for Intimacy

- PROCESSING FEELINGS

The telling of an event over and over without feeling and closure is a form of avoidance since it does not lead to change. The story only helps us not to know our real feelings. Processing the feelings that arise from events leads to a sense of closure and getting

on with our life. We depart from the story, struggle through the process, and reintegrate at a higher level of functioning.

Here is a format that may be helpful in processing the feelings that arise from situations and events that strongly affect one or both partners:

1. Identify the underlying feeling and name it to yourself. This may take talking it out with someone who is objective and perceptive and whom you can trust. Once you know the feeling you can explore its origin. Does it arise solely from the present context or does it trigger your own past distress from early life or from a pattern of old experiences?

Only after you have identified the feeling and understood its origin are you ready to express it effectively to your partner. Now you know what you really feel, how much is personal or historical and how much is interpersonal, and what to ask for. Check in with yourself and others continually about whether you are perceiving a reality or a picture you carry in your mind about how you wish something were. Mental pictures are subtle and seduce us constantly. It takes work to keep correcting ourselves back into reality.

2. Express the feeling to your partner verbally and nonverbally (gestures, voice and face changes, tears, etc.).

3. Ask your partner to acknowledge it, understand it, and care about it. Ask your partner to acknowledge his or her role in stimulating, or occasioning it. Your partner did not cause it since you are a responsible adult not a victim, but he or she is co-accountable for its having arisen.

At this point you can most accurately tell whether it is present or old business. If it is a truly present issue you will feel better for having expressed the feeling no matter what response you have received. You will take it all as information and ask for amends and change but not demand them. No matter what the outcome, you will easily let go. If it was a past issue of yours, you will get caught in drama, story-telling, being right, blaming, and demanding. Your own sense of closure will be thwarted because your reaction has

put your partner on the defensive and communication cannot proceed easily. As a result, you cannot let go of what hurts even more! In such an instance, go back to your objective friend or therapist and work on releasing the past pain. An adult loves to find out where his work really lies, so he can lay it to rest once and for all.

The real meaning of "hard feelings" is old feelings that have become calcified and now hurt us whenever they are pricked. To process is to remove the archaic, painful deposits and liberate the soft, healthy vulnerability so close to our surface and so productive of loving responses in others.

• CONTAINING OUR FEELINGS

Feelings are meant to be expressed *and* contained. An adult shows feelings and does not use them as a pretext to be self-destructive or to hurt others. When someone hurts, angers, or leaves you, allow yourself to feel the pain and talk about it but do not act on the feelings. Express every feeling but act on none. You do not go looking for an assurance or a chance to be avenged or a way to manipulate or to alter the outcome. You contain your feelings and take responsibility for them as totally yours. Someone else has triggered the pain, but it is up to you to take care of yourself by:

1. Accepting the reality of another's action or decision, whether or not you see it as justified, and

2. Feeling the pain keenly without being so possessed by it that it devastates your self-esteem. Feeling but not acting on feelings is the way we let the experience in without letting it penetrate the core of our self-worth. "I acknowledge this reality even though I don't like it. It could be better or it could be worse."

3. Acknowledging that this painful event reminds you of similar ones from childhood. Old feelings about betrayal, abandonment, and rejection are restimulated by contemporary versions of them. The strong feelings we have now show us where our unmourned issues are. Acting on feelings in the present is thus anachronistic! Our present feelings reenact the past and so require no

present taking of action, only expression of the feelings as part of mourning for past pain.

Every relationship includes some hurt. You may hold on to your indignation or to the pursuit of vengeance after being offended by someone. This maintains your grievance and prevents you from ever getting on with mutual commitment. Resentments that are worked through and dropped are the pathfinders to commitment. Resentments that are avenged, held onto, or used as weapons ever after are the stumbling blocks preventing commitment.

To let go of the need for retribution releases you from the pain more powerfully than vengeance ever can. This is because now your life together has gone on in an unconditionally loving way. The hurts have become resolved facts, not stressful stabs at keeping old wounds open.

Every adult relationship requires conflict before true commitment can happen. Each struggle helps you discard yet another illusory ideal about the other person, yet another illusory title to have your expectations met. Every conflict clears away the sham in favor of a fuller revelation of this real person who has not met my every need or measured up to what I wanted, but my love for that person has survived. That is the unconditional love—grounded in reality and mutually liberating—by which true commitment flourishes.

The healthy adult acknowledges that feeling hurt is a universal human experience, always to be expected, never to be consciously inflicted. Such an adult seeks to handle hurt, not to hide from it. All the mythic and religious themes of life-through-death endorse the value and necessity of pain in the emergence of our full and authentic identity. Every hurt was what was somehow required so that we could get here, so that we could let this light through. "It takes just such evil and painful things for the great emancipation to occur," Nietzsche so powerfully reminds us.

Feeling hurt can be processed, worked through, and minimized as healthy relationships progress. When hurt is frequent and severe and cannot be worked through, it is abuse. This leads not to

growth but to lower self-esteem and unredeeming suffering. Mature adults shun liaisons like this and move out of the line of fire to safer pastures.

- FEEDBACK

Cease protecting your partner from knowing how her behavior impacts on you. No adult (who is not hospitalized) is too fragile to receive honest feedback. No adult deserves to be blamed, but anyone can be called to account. Holding back your feelings can be a subtle way to avoid the confrontation that reveals to both of you how unacceptable things are. Your coping may be enabling self-defeating or abusive behavior to go on. Hoping may mean stalling for time. Coping and hoping work for you only when they accompany a solid ongoing program of change to which both of you are deeply committed.

- BEING RIGHT

Give your partner the gift of being right. This applies to emotions and to your partner's perceptions of you. It does not apply to finances, life/death, or abuse issues, nor to addictions or opinions that lead to dangerous consequences. Paradoxically, a person becomes more open to you when you acknowledge his intuitions as making sense. In the bargain, you let go of your own competitiveness, polarizing opposition, and adversarial distancing.

If the result of this process is that you feel wrong, then the point has been missed. We give the gift of being right because being right just does not matter. The need to be right is a form of holding on which is based on fear. Giving the gift of letting someone else be right compassionately allows both of you to relax. The fear eases away and the humor is released. Then the mutual trust level increases.

Once the accent is no longer on being right, you can truly hear the other person. You acknowledge her feeling and make amends for any way in which you may have been irresponsible. You can ask

for this same acknowledgment and amendment when your partner seems irresponsible toward you. Who was right and who was wrong has now become irrelevant and the arrogance of the neurotic ego is succeeded by new humility.

- SENSE OF BEING OWED TO

The abiding sense that you are being cheated or that something is owed to you can lead you to take from others unfairly or to be ungenerous about giving. Waiting for a bargain or a discount price may be a signal that you believe something is owed to you. Work your way out of this by freely giving something to those you think owe you something and ceasing to take unfairly from them.

- SENSE OF OWING

The abiding sense that you owe something can lead you to be people-pleasing, overly generous, or always to "settle for less" in relationships. You may find that you cannot receive from others unless you owe them something. You may believe that you have to purchase others' affection, that it will never come unsought or unbought. (The price is always our own self-emergence.) Work with this by asking for a stringless gift—one that requires no gift in return—from those you think you are indebted to.

- COMPASSION

We may reckon an inability to give to be stinginess or constant giving with little ability to receive to be generosity. We may rightly consider an intrusive, controlling manner to be manipulative. We may perceive fear of speaking up or acceptance of abuse as cowardice or passivity. We may be impatient with someone who is afraid to be held or touched. We may think we are being rejected by someone who is afraid to show his feelings or someone who is so self-absorbed that he cannot focus on us.

As we allow our softer side to emerge, we notice a new dimension: every one of these negative qualities is actually a form of

pain. No one wants to be afraid of closeness; it hurts to have that fear! A controlling person feels the pain of stress and of noticing that her mien alienates her from others' love! We deal assertively with the impact of all these behaviors on us: we report our feelings and misgivings; we ask for change. At the very same time, we feel compassion for the unattended pain behind every holding-back and holding-on. Our compassion does not stop us from taking care of ourselves, but it does make our sensitivity to pain acute. The more spiritually conscious we become, the more we allow ourselves to recognize the subtle face of pain and fear that lurks behind the behaviors we judge. "It is only with the heart that one sees rightly" (*The Little Prince*).

Spiritual compassion enlarges our generosity and integrity also. When we operate from a strong functional ego, our integrity makes us act fairly toward others. When we have integrated ego with spiritual wisdom, integrity engages a compassion that transcends fairness while always including it.

In a relationship, this may mean that both parties do not choose to use the same freedoms or limitations. For example: "You feel great pain when I form close outside relationships, even though they are not sexual. I feel no pain at all about your outside relating. To be fair, both of us have equal latitude in this area. To be compassionate, I give up the exercise of my right since it triggers so much hurt in you—without asking you for the same in return. Meanwhile, with compassion for me, you have committed yourself to working in therapy on your fear and jealousy so that eventually I can relate to others with no consequence to you."

The "double standard" refers to moral issues but not to consciously compassionate relationships.

- TIME OUT

In childhood we have full permission to cling, to go out of control, to have a temper tantrum or to be impractical. The wise parent allows this within limits. A healthy adulthood includes an occasional liberating visit to these familiar (but now scary) places. Our inner nurturant parent allows this flexibility within the limits of time, place, and responsibility.

One couple may, for instance, decide to go away for a weekend and to spend every minute together, clinging to each other for as long as they like. Another couple may choose a hiatus in their contact or separate vacation time. These circumstances could be planned or spontaneous but they are always timebound, conscious, and mutually negotiated. In this way we respect the routine of adulthood but take a safe break from it.

Each of us contains the opposite sides of every human possibility. To be fully sane, practical, centered, and fearless, we need to experience the other side occasionally. "Time out" provides for this creative compensation. The combination of self-permitting and timeboundedness is a humorous defiance of those "solid truths" about the folly of clinging. We honor the truths but slip by them for fun, like Ulysses, the trickster, who enjoyed the sirens' song while sailing safely by.

- DECIDING

In matters of the heart, thinking (ironically) leads only to more confusion. What works best is simply noticing:

—what your body feels;
—what your actions are;
—what your intuition keeps coming back to.

Noticing leads to knowing. You can trust this to happen automatically. Effort may only confound. The next best step appears when we pay attention to the parts of ourselves that cannot deceive: body, behavior, inner wisdom. A decision will feel right when it arrives unhurried and with a sense of belonging in all three of these personal territories.

The decision with wisdom usually finds a way not to exclude one side totally, not *either . . . or* but *both . . . and.* Such a decision embraces risk rather than avoids it. It is the decision with power but

without control, with respect for others' wishes but with request for what one wants, with acknowledgment of one's history but with no enslavement to it.

Before making any serious or lasting decision, test yourself at wanting it consistently each day for one to six months: "I have to want to marry you for six months before I agree to set the date."

This same procedure can be used if you are ambivalent about returning to a former partner. Instead of denying your inclination or fighting it off, tell yourself you will seek reunion if you want it consistently every day for six months. Then you will feel no pressure or self-denial but a permission that honors the test of time and protects you from a precipitous decision.

• STALEMATE

Like a sailboat in a windless port, a relationship is sometimes unmoving and stuck. There is no joy, no problem, and no motivation for change. "If he would have an affair, I'd at least have a reason to leave!" But he instigates no facilitating crisis. I am faced with the totally adult predicament of having no one to blame and no one to precipitate an interruption of the mediocrity. We can both go on for years not going on with liveliness—"till death do us part."

How can the bind of Lord and Lady Deadlock be broken? The partner with the lower level of tolerance for boredom (i.e. the higher bottom line) takes the action. He does something—for his own pleasure—that is different, sudden, and surprising. This rivets attention on the mutual emptiness and activates radical alteration. It does not matter whether the change is "for better or for worse." Either result will blow you away from the sultry port.

• AT THE END

There are many levels of loss throughout distressed relationships. Each is a letdown; each bursts an illusion; each requires griefwork.

Here are examples of the checkpoints of loss in a relationship that has ended:

Certitude the relationship will work
Ends and leads to
↓
Hope it can work
Ends and takes action in
↓
Struggle to make it work
Ends and leads to
↓
Realization that it will not work

In a truly conscious relationship, each partner notices these endings and grieves the unique loss entailed in each of them. In most relationships, unfortunately, the shifts are imperceptible and unmourned. As a result, when the relationship ends, we are faced with all the unattended additive grief. The best signal of this is a sense of disappointment, bitter resentment, and self-pity that can recur for years.

Appropriate grief is current. It follows in the wake of each passing chance for success. True grief does not begin in divorce. It begins when the romance ends and then recommences with each hope that comes to naught.

The grief that is unnoticed, unprocessed, and never called by name actually contributes to the breakdown of relationships. A sense of defeat, anger, and blame gnaws at the bonds of love. Then a depression shadows us and we never quite know why.

Griefwork done mutually builds intimacy because it means sharing feelings, consciously and safely. When the sadness, anger, hurt, etc. of grief are experienced in the container of tender compassion, commitment grows. The very ability to allow ongoing grief and ongoing love to coexist may break the downward spiral of failure.

All the processes of grief outlined in Chapter 1 apply to the ending of a relationship. The worse the relationship, the longer is the mourning required. This is because we are letting go not only of the partner and the relationship but also of the illusory hope that it would work.

Sleep and appetite disorders are to be expected in a time of crisis. It is important to take care of oneself by eating and resting regularly but not excessively. It is also important to treat oneself to what one most enjoys without using drugs or alcohol to avoid the stress. This combination of self-nurturance and self-protection provides the best conditions for processing the loss that has occurred.

Stress prevents us from thinking clearly, so impulsive decisions—especially regarding finances, possessions, legal issues, or relocating—during this time are dangerous. Any thought is appropriate, but action requires long-term consideration and prior feedback from objective friends.

Separation leads to self-doubt. You may then believe you may never find another partner. This gives you information not about reality but about how wounded you feel. It is the fear element of grief and it recedes as your grief work proceeds. Gradually in the process of separation and grief you find out things about yourself (and your partner) that surprise and discourage you. You believe you are isolated and faced with a hopeless void. This is the same void most people avoid during relationships. It opens its jaws when denial ceases and we acknowledge our shadow side.

Grief work, with its cathartic experience of feelings, truly and finally bridges this abyss. We accept and forgive ourselves for not being perfect and we make amends where that is appropriate. Then the void becomes just the *spaciousness* we needed to greet ourselves authentically and to be renewed.

Obsessive or suicidal thoughts and repeating your story are perfectly normal and are to be allowed—as the nurturant parent allows the child to tell about her nightmare again and again. All

that matters is that you do not act on the feelings or the thoughts by any attempts to hurt yourself or punish the other. Contain the feelings and thoughts within yourself and your own support system.

What works best is to allow every feeling and thought to pass through you as good hikers through the woods: taking nothing away, leaving nothing behind. Make no attempt to think them away, to interpret, or to interrupt them no matter how irrational or inconvenient they may seem. "The only way to live is like the rose: without a Why," as Meister Eckhart exclaims.

Be wary of contact with your former partner too soon after separation. The belief that you have something to tell her may mask a manipulation to change or punish her or to justify yourself. This distracts you from the fact of the ending and the grieving of it.

It is normal to feel love for, anger toward, and fear of a former partner, since the essential bond between you has been defeated, but not ended, by separation. This bond is unconditional and beyond the reach of betrayal, change, or divorce. In true grief work, we acknowledge this bond but no longer act upon it. *The bond remains but the transactions are ended.* Now we contain the love for—without having to take care of—the other. We contain the anger without having to gain satisfaction for it. We contain the fear without having to devise complex strategies to avoid chance meetings.

Grieving occurs best in the gap that opens in your life once you are alone. It cannot proceed while you are involved with someone new. When a relationship has ended, the healthy adult allows adequate time alone for working through grief and for processing what has been learned. Time elapses and then readiness for a new relationship occurs. One neither seeks nor avoids but lets it come unsought. This is trusting the synchronous timing of the universe over inner urgency or social pressures.

One of the difficulties in moving out of the familiar is the temptation to close off the full drama of change before it

ripens. The sense of being bereft of all that is familiar is a vacuum which threatens to suck up everything within its reach.

What is hard to appreciate, when terror shapes a catastrophic gap, is that this blankness can be a Fertile Void. The Fertile Void is the existential metaphor for giving up the familiar supports of the present and trusting the momentum of life to produce new opportunities and vistas.

The acrobat who swings from one trapeze to the next knows just when he must let go. He gauges his release exquisitely and for a moment he has nothing going for him but his own momentum. Our hearts follow his arc and we love him for risking the unsupported moment.

—Erving and Miriam Polster,
Gestalt Therapy Integrated

SUMMARY REFLECTIONS ON PART TWO: ADULT LIVING IN RELATIONSHIPS

The "Givens" of Relationships: Antidotes to Unrealistic Expectations

All factors in relationships pass through phases: intimacy, affection, sexual interest/energy, commitment to children and family, compatibility, self-disclosure.

Only at rare moments is the love in one partner the same as that in the other.

Priorities are continually changing for each partner. The integrity of the union may not always be a priority.

No truly loving relationship takes away—or can take away—even one of your basic human rights.

Intimate relationships survive best with constant permission for ever-changing ratios of closeness and distance.

What *creates* distance in your relationship, you may be using unconsciously to *get* distance.

The best relationship includes space for you to pursue individual choices and to be compassionately attentive to any threat your partner may feel.

No one can control or change someone else, nor is it necessary.

No one is loyal or truthful all the time.

No expectations are valid and not even agreements are always reliable.

Your partner may not always be a consistent, nurturant, or a trustworthy friend to you (nor you to your partner).

You are ultimately alone and ultimately able to make it alone.

No relationship can create self-esteem, only support it.

There is no one person who will make you happy, keep you fascinated, love you as your favorite parent did, or give you the love you missed from your parents.

Most people in relationships seldom know what they really want, ask for what they really want, or show what they really feel.

Most people avoid or fear intimacy, consistent honesty, intense feelings, and uninhibited joy.

Beneath every serious complaint about your partner is something unowned in yourself.

Letting go of blame and the need to be right heals a relationship most efficaciously.

Jealousy and possessiveness, though not desirable, are normal human feelings.

"Goodbye" is rarely said clearly; most people ease away wordlessly and avoid full confrontation.

No one is to blame when a relationship ends.

The end of one relationship will always require a space before another relationship can begin healthily.

It is normal for memories, regrets, the wish for revenge, and a recurrent sense of loss far, far to outlast the ending of a relationship.

One of your (or your partner's) parents is a phantom, but active, presence at the beginning, middle, or ending of your relationship.

The powerful appeal of someone new may tell you more about your own neediness than about the charms of the other person.

A relationship is a spiritual path since it consists of a continual shedding of illusions.

Throughout all eternity,
I forgive you,
You forgive me.
—William Blake
to his wife