

# The Art and Science of Conscious Relationship

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Of all the forms of counselling my favourite one is couple and relationship counselling. In all other forms of counselling, personal development and psychotherapy, working one on one or in a made-up group – the clients still have to go home and integrate whatever was achieved in the session – into their normal relationship at home. But when you have both parts of a living relationship together in one process, if the process has any effect at all – whatever is achieved there is *already* integrated between them, because they achieve it together. Something is already done, a social form, however small, has upgraded itself. They take it home with them. The relationship itself has been upgraded.

I have been doing counselling, training practitioners and consulting organisations for the past 30 years in many countries, trained and qualified practitioners in six countries, lived, studied and worked in diverse international and migration countries with people from many different cultures and ethnic groups. Many things are different and many are common to all of them: they all wish to develop personally to realise the next level of their human potential, they all wish to develop stronger, more authentic and more expressive individuality, and they all strive to a higher level of personal relationship than the one their parents could achieved.

I therefore regard the art and science of conscious relationship not as a set of problems to solve – but as a cutting edge, a frontier and a growing point in the evolution of human consciousness. These are not problems to solve. The high standards of personal relationship that both men and women claim to be their birthright – were never striven for, let alone achieved by previous generations. Intimacy itself is a new concept, formed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century from the Latin *intimare* ‘to make known’ and the 17<sup>th</sup> century from the Latin root of *intimus* – ‘innermost’ – it is a relatively new word for a new experience. We always had sex and produced children, but intimacy was born of the time when individuality started to become a reality and a value in itself – Renaissance and Reformation.

The unstoppable striving for greater individuality and independence and the permanent desire and longing for intimate relationship is a contradiction. The drive to be true to oneself and the imperative to change oneself in order to create and accommodate a common space, time, body, home, community with another individual seem to be opposites. But the development of individuality and the development of the capacity to be intimate are inseparable. Traditions, past experience, role models, past standards and legacy of our parents - become progressively less and less relevant as guidance in creating new intimate relationships. There are no models to follow. We have to re-invent the new ideals of intimate relationship as we have to invent the new ideals of what it is to be a man and a woman. And we have to invent it out of the future, not out of the past.

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To have an intimate relationship at all is a gift of destiny. So much has to ‘coincidentally’ come together to even start it: to even meet, at a time when both are available, to be interested and attracted to each other, which is pure alchemy, for love to be even an option, for the mutual respect to be there, for commitment to feel possible, for the thousands of details to fall into place for the intimacy to form, for the trust to even start. And then to the myriad of daily tests that have to be faced. It is a

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garden that is given, and then it needs to be cared for, to even stay a garden rather than a trap, a prison and a war zone. The pressures of modern life will take their toll, the dust of daily life will descend and the tests will come. The initial gift will be threatened. Falling in love will have to be replaced by the art of loving. Some aspects of the initial gift could potentially be rescued and restored when damaged, some not. A new element will have to evolve to maintain the initial gift of destiny: Methodical Empathy. It has to be cultivated consciously, or not. The longest distance in the world will have to be crossed to give us a chance: shifting from seeing life and you from my point of view – into seeing them from yours. If that is even attempted – there is a chance to sustain and develop the initial gift.

If strong enough attraction, interest, trust and respect were truly there initially – conscious cultivation of empathy can potentially restore them. If these were initially weak or delusional – empathy can only reveal this fact, because empathy is a sharper perception of what is really there. We project into the other and into the meeting *everything*. Who is to tell us what is real in all of that and what is an illusion to start with? Nothing but our personal intuition. But intuition has to grow.

Human consciousness is evolving, and intimate relationship is its front line. Very few people will choose freely to parent their children the way their parents parented them, and fewer would freely choose to immolate the way their parents lived with each other intimately. The deep intuition is to change, but how?

Often I find myself saying to a troubled couple in a session: “you as you are cannot make it. The crisis you are in is a result of you as you are. But if each one of you individually chooses to change – maybe you have a chance”. Because conflicts are created together, but solutions are created only individually. The consciousness that created the problem is not the consciousness that can resolve it. A new consciousness must evolve in order to do things differently. That *IS* evolution. But the only free movement is changing oneself, and that requires looking at oneself and applying practically a higher principle.

We are born with 6 to 12 (depending on the way you count it) normal senses for navigation in the outer world. We are born with *no sense* for perception, navigation and orientation in the inner world. That we have to cultivate ourselves. The human soul (psyche) is not an object, and when observed as an object – it remains invisible and unheard. New eyes, new ears and a new sense of knowing the other from inside are needed. These are the three fundamental needs of maintaining, developing and growing personal intimacy: “See me, Hear me, Know me”. Feeling seen, heard and known are what creates the initial intimacy to start with, but that is a gift. To keep the intimacy alive – these new sense-organs must be cultivated consciously. In Psychophonetics we call them ‘The Three Core Competencies of Methodical Empathy’: Perceptive Imagination to ‘See’ the soul of the other; Perceptive Inspiration to ‘Hear’ the soul of the other; Perceptive Intuition to ‘Know’ the soul of the other. At Skola Empathie in Slovakia (Bratislava and Kosice) we teach and train people to cultivate these faculties consciously and methodically. That is why we call it ‘Methodical Empathy’. Our whole training curriculum on all levels is designed to serve that purpose, starting from the single personal session, unto full professional qualification as a Methodical Empathy Trainer. Empathy can be cultivated consciously. Methodical Empathy can save relationships, families, parenthood, sometimes lives.

For that purpose we developed special processes for specific purposes of healing and cultivating intimate relationships. They are called ‘Relationship Healing Rituals’:

**1) Body Self-Empathy** – developing a deeper ability to listen to the body when it tries to tell you that something is not right. The head can be blind to the state of intimate reality, but the body, especially the heart and the sexual region is awake to it, if you would care to listen to it. The body can act as an alarm system calling for attention.

**2) Reflective listening** – the discipline of reflecting on what was said to you before answering. Most of the time we hear what we want to hear, or what we are afraid to hear or what we assume that we hear, because we heard it before – but what is actually intended and spoken now. This is just basic relationship hygiene.

**3) Methodical Empathy** – applying proactive hearing of the other. Words express the tip of the iceberg of what we really intend to say. Listening and responding to words alone is a waste of time. The major content of sharing in intimate relationship is not spoken in words. To hear a heart we have to listen with our heart; to hear the depth of the soul we have to listen with our whole body.

**4) Parallel Processing** – everything said and done in intimate relationship presses personal buttons and provokes waves of inner responses in the soul of the listener: reactions, projections, memories, defensive patterns, desires, frustrations, negativity, hopes. All of them real, all of them subjective, all of them can colour and filter and distort what the other is actually trying to say and what the other really mean by what they do. All these have to be met, seen, acknowledged and responsibility must be taken to them – before you have a chance to actually see, hear and understand what is really meant by the other.

**5) Acknowledging Inner Facts** – inner facts are as real as out facts. I may provoke your defensive reaction by what I said or done – even if you completely misunderstood me. Your reaction to me is real in itself. My reaction to your reaction is also real in itself. Our reactions, feelings, associations, interpretations – even when erroneous – become a reality. The claim of absolute truth in intimate relationship is distractive. Only personal truth matters in intimate relationship. When they are respected as reality – a greater common reality may be discovered. Not otherwise.

**6) Two Realities** – there is no real contradiction when there are two versions of reality in regard to the same moment, event, situation. To acknowledge that obvious fact can put a stop to the most painful conflict. We are different individuals in so many ways, and whenever we look at the same situation we see it differently and we form different realities and memories about it. We give ‘objective’ facts ‘subjective’ meaning, and then we argue endlessly which one of us got it right. We are both right. If only that was respected we could move together to a greater common reality, not before.

**7) The Request Ritual** – shifting from a dynamic of unspoken expectations, disappointments and manipulations – into a dynamic of clear requests and free gifts. All requests can be made and understood, without expectation of fulfilment; free gifts can be made in response to the requests; on that basis a new contract is being made. All contracts can be reviewed and new contracts can be made in the same way.

**8) Acknowledging Reactions** – Reactions kill intimacy. These are defensive actions that are automatic, repetitive, compulsive, destructive. They are never originated by what the person in front of us says or does. That is just a trigger, a provocation. The real source of the reactive action is behind consciousness. Blaming the other for my reaction is the beginning of the end of intimacy. It starts a chain-reaction. Only I can explore, discover and overcome my reaction, only you can take care of your reaction. This is the equivalent of taking care of weeds in your garden. If you let them grow – there will be no garden.

**9) Owning Projections** – we project what we do not own in ourselves at the other person. That is normal. We see the other through the coloured lenses of what we do not own in ourselves, for good and for bad. Perceiving, taking responsibility for and owning my own projections – can free you to be who you really are, not what I make you be.

**10) the ‘Stop Sign’** – establishing the agreement that each one of us can choose to stop the interaction at any moment when he/she feels that it is becoming destructive, even if the other does

not feel that. The result is a 'Cease Fire' for a moment. A new awareness can enter into the unsafe dynamics before it is too late and before real damage is done.

These are some examples of conscious processes designed to create the shift between neglect and care of the garden of intimate relationships. Our bodies anatomically are fit for the purpose of intercourse. That is a gift of nature. Our souls do not naturally fit. We have to create the necessary fitness for each other if we wish intimate relationship to be nurtured and grow. All our pasts will come to expression in intimate relationship, as all the buttons will be pressed. This is a cause of destruction, or an opportunity for healing, development and nurturing of intimacy.

Previous generations cannot role model for us how to create new kind of intimate relationship and how to maintain it. We are becoming more and more complex and individualised. That process will continue. We have to consciously upgrade our awareness of oneself and of other's inner life to catch up with what it takes to have intimate relationship on the basis of growing individualities.

But at the core of all these transformational processes there is this necessity: look at yourself individually, clearly, honestly, helpfully, as objectively as you can (and that can evolve). No one else will do that for you, no one else can. Personal development gives intimate relationship a chance; personal ignorance will destroy it. Wake up.

This is the evolutionary frontier of humanity.

Yehuda