

1: It's All About You

Are you ready for love?

Before we figure out who the girl is and how to find her, we need to make sure you are ready.

If you aren't ready for love, what are you ready for?

A one-nighter?

A fling?

A friends-with-benefits arrangement?

An entanglement?

A drama?

What if I tell you that you can have anything you want?

What would you choose?

You can have the kind of relationship you want.

You can have the kind of relationship you want.

You can have the kind of relationship you want.

The first step is knowing what you want.

The second step is making sure you are ready.

This chapter is about getting ready for love. With a woman.

This chapter is about you.

Prepare for Heartbreak

This may not be what you want to hear, but I will tell you the truth.

To be ready to love deeply and to attract a relationship with someone who can meet you intimately, excitedly, profoundly, full-on and full-out, you need to be ready and willing to break your heart.

To break your own heart open.

To suffer loss.

When we break our hearts open, they can expand.

We have the chance to let love in.

We have the chance of letting love out.

We take the risk of offering up our best, bravest, most vulnerable selves for the benefit of our beloved, ourselves, our world.

And we do that knowing that we will say good-bye.

All relationships change.

They change when death parts us.

Or when someone stops choosing love.

Or when someone chooses to stop showing up.

It's terrifying.

And worthwhile.

The choice is ours.

Do we create love and closeness worth having, an intimate adventure worth the risks involved, love worth breaking our hearts open for?

Or do we hang back, play it safe, focus on other things, decide love is not for us?

Do we choose to hide?

Do we choose serial entanglements?

Do we choose people who can't or won't break open their own hearts, who are not ready to set out on the trip, or not ready to set out on the trip with us?

If we do, it's not about them.

It's about us.

It's about you.

Have you ever seen a geode? Envision it the size of your heart, with a hard, crusty rock exterior, protecting unspeakably beautiful luminescent crystals inside.

Love is this glowing, brilliant interior. Love refracts and magnifies light. It makes the world more beautiful. It makes us show up to be the best, most generous versions of ourselves.

In order to get to it, to share it, you must be willing to crack your heart wide open.

Don't expect a woman to do this for you.

Don't expect a woman to do this to you.

This is your work.

Perhaps your heart is not a geode, hasn't ever rolled down the mountain in the heat of volcanic eruption, isn't quite so heavily guarded.

Perhaps your heart is more a bud, not yet open, guarding its seed, or a soon-to-be butterfly still in the chrysalis, or a beehive full of honey.

However your heart is, it is yours to choose to open.

You must be clear about what you want.

You must be clear about what you bring.

You must know your heart.

And you must be willing to open it if you want to create a love that lasts until you break your heart over it when it ends.

And longer.

WHY IS IT ABOUT YOU?

You opened this book with the idea that you would learn something about how to find a partner, how to create a partnership. I promise to deliver.

We start with helping you prepare because if you are not prepared, you may find The Woman but you may not know what to do when you do.

You may not be ready.

You may not even realize that she is someone who could be yours, someone to whom you could magnificently belong.

And that would be a damned shame.

Yes?

Yes.

Yes indeed, because of the importance of love and finding a mate, that would be tragic.

That, too, will break your heart.

And that heartbreak will be worse than the heartbreak of losing someone to death.

Don't let this happen to you, to her, to the world.

Knowing the tragedy of being clueless, let's begin with some fundamentals.

WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO TO GET READY

Before you become discouraged over the idea that to find true love you have to look at yourself, let me reassure you.

To be ready doesn't mean:

*Perfection

*That you need to be

Lean

Or curvy

Or hip

Or young
Or able-bodied
Or small
Or tall
Or without challenges
Or wealthy
Or completely cool
Or completely wise
Or completely together
Or at the top of your professional game
Or completely charming
Or completely content
Or able to cook (though that helps)
Or ever to have gotten it right before

You may be working on improving various areas of your life---most of us are---but how lovable you are, and how able you are to give and receive loving connection---isn't a function of your age or size or shape or fitness or health history or fashion sense or bank account.

Think about it:

You probably know people who conform to conventional beauty standards who aren't kind.

You probably know people who have access to wealth who aren't deep.

You probably know people who are "living the dream" who treat people badly.

And you probably know people who are or have none of these things and who are in wonderful, loving relationships.

So: when I say we need to begin with you, it's not about sentencing you to some Dating Reform Purgatory Boot Camp until you have the right haircut, the right bank account, the right weight, or the right address to be eligible for love.

It is about getting right with yourself, and being able to be emotionally available to yourself and someone else.

If you are still entangled with someone, we'll need to clear that out.

If you're not available because your primary relationship is with a bottle or a syringe or a bottle of pain killers, we'll need to clear that up.

If you have issues with yourself around age or size or money or some other thing, we'll need to help you see yourself kindly and clearly.

Clearing things out and cleaning things up and seeing more clearly may mean taking action.

Or it may mean simply choosing to love and accept yourself, as is ---- even if you also are making changes.

I'm guessing you know which of these is most beneficial on your quest for love.

In fact, by loving and accepting yourself right now, you will be more able to see any action you might need to take to help yourself --- and to help your beloved.

If you cannot love yourself in your imperfections, in your process of becoming, it will be much harder for you to love your beloved unconditionally, in the way that she deserves.

(And no, loving unconditionally is not the same as unconditional participation. It's important not to participate in relationships with women who aren't available to love you well. We'll talk about this. But right now, we're talking about you!)

Ultimately, the question is this: are you available right now to love?

If you aren't, what stands in its way?

If you want love, we need to remove the barriers and blockages and forms of resistance that are making it harder for love to get in and to get out, the habits that allow you to push love away or to be less than your bravest, most generously loving self.

If you want a fantastic mate, you need to be available to meet her and greet her and date her and mate her in all of the ways you hope she will do all of these things with you.

You must make yourself available.

And you must you acquire skills.

And knowledge.

And vision.

This is true for any grand enterprise you ever undertake, and it is true for having the most fantastic relationship possible with the woman of your dreams.

Of course it's not an accident. It takes training. And commitment. And practice.

When you are available, you with your vision and your skills and your knowledge and your kindness, you will be less likely to miss love when it shows up, more able to make love, to create love, to keep love growing when the opportunity with a fantastic woman appears.

You will be less likely to break your own heart through the tragedy of cluelessness and more likely to break your heart open through the breathtaking miracle of love.

WHY PARTNERING IS IMPORTANT

In this book, we focus on dating with your eyes on the prize of creating deep, happy partnerships.

You don't need me to tell you how to pick up girls, have a vacation romance, or create an entanglement that will test your sanity.

Chances are, you already have these skills.

What we are talking about here is love.

Love, baby.

That doesn't mean that every date you'll go on will lead you down the aisle.

It doesn't mean that most dates you go on will even lead you through the bedroom door, even if you do enjoy a hot tryst on your living room floor or on a beach at midnight or in the backseat of a car a time or two or three.

After all, finding your next mate will involve a certain amount of exploration, experimentation, fun, and frustration.

Still, whether we are showing up with an honest, clear intention of finding a partner makes all the difference in how these things go, how we feel about ourselves and the process, how we lay the foundations for love, how and why we say no and yes, and the gifts we might offer others we meet along the way --- even if they are not the people we choose.

So, why is partnering important?

What is your answer?

Why is partnering important to you?

As mammals, warm blooded creatures who gestate our young, we need connection.

As human beings, we are fundamentally and profoundly designed for interdependence.

Have you heard that we come into the world alone?

Think about that.

Nobody comes into the world alone.

If we are fortunate, we won't leave the world alone, either.

We arrive having been constantly held by our mothers' bodies for nearly a year, and we arrive in a state that requires support, nurturing, and care.

We are designed for connection.

When we are closely connected in healthy ways to others, especially ways that involve touch and security and sex and trust, our bodies function better.

Our mental health is better.

We are calmer.

We are happier.

We can make more cool shit happen.

We can give more to the world.

We live longer.

We have more fun.

So, the real deal will break your heart precisely because it is so freaking important, so wonderful, so human.

Don't be deceived into thinking there's something wrong with you for having a deep yearning for an intimate companion, a help-meet, a sweetheart, a partner.

Who do you think benefits from the idea that the pinnacle of maturity and mental health is our capacity to operate totally independently, totally self-contained, totally on our own island?

Who benefits from that ideology?

Corporations who want to own all of your time, professions that will reward you with cash but not care, and people in your life who have reasons of their own to want you to stay available.

These are those who prefer you remain single.

And if you prefer to partner with people of your own sex or gender, there's a long weighty history leaning on you to live solo.

So for those of us who are queer, heterosexism and homophobia in a wealth of forms are also served when we stay single.

The truth is that while we are not a species that mates with one partner for life, we are a species that does best when we are connected to intimate others, to partners, to family, to village, to collective.

Consider it your human birthright to desire connection with a mate.

Never in the history of the world has it been more possible for a woman to partner with a woman.

Even with the challenges we still face, now --- now --- is the best time to find her, the best time for her to find you, the best time for the best chance of a glorious partnership between you to develop in the history of the whole damned, beautiful, breathtaking world.

Consider this book one of your tools on the journey to finding her.

FUNDAMENTAL COMMITMENT

Here, at the outset, even before we talk more about availability and skills and philosophy and knowledge and vision, you'll need to make a fundamental commitment.

The fundamental commitment is this:

You need to commit to clearing out anything that is a barrier to love --- anything that is a barrier to your receiving love, anything that is a barrier to your giving love, anything that stands between you and your capacity to give and receive, receive and give.

Notice that I don't say that you need to increase your lovability.

You are lovable.

Trust that.

Your lovability is not up for evaluation or question or negotiation.

What we're talking about here are circumstances, behaviors, choices, decisions, situations, attitudes, beliefs, habits, and conditions that stand in the way of love.

And all or any of these, you can change.

Here, at the beginning, decide to get rid of anything that stands between you and your availability to practice and create and receive the real deal of love.

Say it out loud, please:

“I commit to clearing out anything that is a barrier to love --- anything that is a barrier to receiving love or giving love, anything that stands between me and my capacity to give and receive, receive and give.”

Write it down in your own handwriting, please:

“I commit to clearing out anything that is a barrier to love --- anything that is a barrier to receiving love or giving love, anything that stands between me and my capacity to give and receive, receive and give.”

Tape this to your bathroom mirror, and say it out loud every morning and every evening.

Let it sink in.

Every day, discover what it means to keep this commitment through action.

Keep this commitment.

WHAT YOU DO HAVE TO DO TO GET READY

To prepare yourself for the best love of your life, you'll need a few things.

You'll need to have a relationship vision.

You'll need to be available.

You'll need to have skills.

You will need to be willing to be vulnerable ---very vulnerable.

And you will need to be brave---very brave.

You will need to know yourself very well.

You will need to learn how to show up and stay present.

You will need to know how to make a choice and then commit to that choice again and again.

You'll need to do what you already have done: to make a fundamental commitment to love.

WHAT'S YOUR VISION OF YOUR LIFE?

You probably expect me to ask you to map out your "must haves" and "deal breakers" in an ideal mate.

We'll get to that --- in a whole new way--- in another chapter.

Here, we're going to talk about your vision.

Not your vision of a Perfect Girlfriend, but your vision of a great life, and a great relationship inside of that great life.

Why?

Because if you don't have a vision of your great life, or if you are waiting to start your great life when your great girlfriend shows up, you are not going to attract the woman you need, or be able to recognize the woman you need when she shows up.

And that could mean things don't go very well in your ideal life or your great relationship.

We want to reduce the randomness of who you're going to call in.

Not that the universe doesn't have its random magic and its magical randomness.

We love that!

But the point is to have a vision of a relationship that is clear enough that you can share it with someone fantastic, rather than waiting around for her to show up and do the work for you.

She's doing her own work, creating her ideal vision, her ideal life, getting ready for you.

By having clarity around your life and relationship vision, you will be better able to attract women who are good matches for your life.

You will no longer sign up for women with whom you have wild chemistry with the hope that they will be able to be a good collaborator in your best life possible but no actual knowledge about whether they have the skills and qualities you need in a mate.

(How has that been working out, BTW?)

So, what's your life vision?

Do you intend to rise through corporate ranks?

Do you intend to live on a farm, grow your own food, and never wear corporate drag?

Do you intend to have children?

To travel or to stay rooted in place?

To retire? What do you want to do if you retire?

To do community work?

To live in a commune and make organic peanut butter with 30 awesome friends?

To go on a retreat for two months every year?

How do you envision a fantastic relationship fitting into this fantastic life of yours?

Are you going to grad school and expecting to live as a researcher or professor who will have to go wherever the job leads?

Are you in the military, expecting the same?

Do you envision a simple lifestyle as your ideal, or one that involves big ticket luxuries?

Do you envision an active life or a leisurely paced one?

How important is intellectual stimulation to you in a partner?

How important is shared religious or spiritual beliefs?

How important are shared political perspectives?

How important is fitness?

What kind of home do you plan to live in?

What are your financial values?

How much of your ideal life do you ideally share with your ideal mate?

I mean: do you want to work together in the same profession, own an enterprise together, do live together, play together, travel together, raise kids together?

How much of that is important to you, and where are the places where you value your independence or don't care if there's overlap?

What do you need to be happy?

All of these questions about you and your life set the stage for your ideal relationship because they allow you to convey more clearly to your prospective partners where and how you see yourself on

the landscape, which will allow them and you to understand better how your vision and their vision for themselves line up.

If this were the 1950's and we were straight and white and middle class in the US, there would be some pre-fab answers to these questions.

You could live by the code, or not, but we would expect one person to be involved in the paid labor market and one person doing everything else at home as the gener

If it's now and we were straight and white and middle class, there would still be a model everyone recognized for people of a certain race and class.

It would be the general idea of what was expected. If you were not middle class or not white there would be a different formula.

One of the benefits of being women who date women or queer folks who date queer folks is that we really do get to question all of that.

We get to invent our own systems.

You may want to have a life in which you are a stay at home parent and your partner exchanges her time and energy for the cash that keeps things going.

You may want to travel the world for work and have a family to come home to.

Or you may want to travel the world for work with your partner and your kiddos.

Or not.

Life vision, relationship vision.

What do you want?

You can have what you want.

It will come much easier if you have a vision.

WHAT'S YOUR VISION OF YOUR IDEAL RELATIONSHIP?

Okay, this is closer to why you came, yes?

I know you're itching to talk about and think about and go out and find The Girl. We will! But before we talk about your dream girl, let's talk about your dream relationship.

In some ways this seems very simple.

In other ways, it is incredibly complex.

We talk about your relationship vision first in order to help you avoid the trap of thinking that if you find a woman with XYZ traits, your dream relationship will naturally unfold.

Remember, we're doing the work of getting ready so that we can recognize the woman when she shows up and we're building the skills we need to create something amazing with her when we find her.

One reason we need to get ready like this is that your dream partner may show up in a package you don't yet recognize.

And your nightmare girlfriend may show up in a perfect package.

You may have chosen the wrong woman many times because of the myth that your dream girl is gonna look a certain way, or the myth that you will immediately know her by your instant "chemistry" with her.

The clearer you are about the life you want and the kind of relationship you want, the more able you will be to stop making that mistake.

One piece of that is knowing what kind of relationship we want.

Let's start with some structural questions, then go deeper.

Do you want a relationship that is monogamous, monogam-ish, or non-monogamous?

Do you want a relationship that involves shared domestic life? That is: do you want to live with your person, or will that not work for you?

Do you want a relationship that includes children?

Let's turn to some functional questions.

If a good relationship is more than the sum of its parts, what do you envision your great relationship changing about your already great life?

How do you want your life to be richer or better or more or different as a function of having a great relationship?

Will life be funnier?

More interesting?

More creative?

Financially more secure or powerful?

Does having a great relationship mean the difference between having children or not having children?

How will a great romantic relationship be different from your great friendships?

Let's talk about touch.

For some people, one of the key elements differentiating partnerships and friendships is touch.

For others, this is not the case.

How is it for you in your ideal partnership?

Do you enjoy sex?

Do you enjoy non-sexual touch?

Does touch freak you out?

More asexual people are coming out as asexual and finding life partners with whom to have relationships that don't include genital sex.

You can have the relationship you want.

It's easier to create the relationship you want if you know yourself and have a vision for what you want.

SPOILER: WHO IS THE WOMAN YOU WANT?

The woman you want is the woman who can share your vision of the life you want, the woman who wants to sign up to create it with you.

Her height and her weight and her eye color are irrelevant. Hold this thought until the next chapter.

So, now that we have some vision going on, let's look at what's preventing that vision from becoming reality.

AVAILABILITY 1.0

We'll start with the obvious stuff and then dig deeper, okay?

Let's start with basic availability.

One of the fundamental barriers to finding and creating a fantastic, loving partnership is this: you are not available.

If you are not available, you need to make yourself available as a fundamental condition on your quest to Get The Girl and have a fantastic life together.

“Unavailable” takes many shapes.

Some of its shapes are in the form of your connection to others:

If you are in a relationship that isn't the relationship you want or need, and you believe it never can become the loving partnership you desire and are capable of, you aren't available.

If you are occupied with dating people who aren't great matches because you are bored or scared or afraid to be alone, you aren't available.

If you are in the middle of a messy breakup, you aren't available.

If you are nurturing a heartbreak, you aren't available.

If you can't have a first, second, or third date without reviewing the sins of your Ex, you are not available.

“Unavailable” also can be a little less obvious.

If you have unfinished business with an Ex or an unrequited love you will allow to sabotage a new relationship, you are unavailable.

Ex-ample: You start seeing someone new, and your saboteur criticizes them or discourages you from giving the relationship time to develop; you allow them to influence you away from closeness with your new love interest.

Ex-ample: After being single for years, you begin to date someone you're excited about. A friend who is unavailable herself but with whom you've long had a certain chemistry suddenly steps up and says she will leave her partner/husband/situation to be with you. This is not love; it's sabotage. But if you would fall for this, you are not available.

If you have unfinished business with parents or kids or friends or Exes you will allow to sabotage a new love, you are unavailable.

Notice that I say “that you will allow;” people may or may not try to exert influence on us; whether we allow them to interfere with our search for relationship happiness is up to us. We are responsible for how we allow others to interfere.

You need to get yourself free of these circumstances in order to become available.

You expect your fantastic woman to be free of entanglements, yes?

Offer her the same gift. Why would you offer less? Why would she settle for less than all of you?

AVAILABILITY 2.0

You may be completely single and un-entangled with other people but still not available.

If you assume love can't or won't happen for you, you aren't completely available.

If you are in love with someone who isn't available to you, and this holds your heart back from other lovers, you aren't completely available.

If you are nurturing the idea that your previous love is the only woman with whom you could have Great Love, you aren't completely available.

If you assume that anyone who could love you is deeply flawed, you aren't available to someone fantastic for you.

If you work a million hours and are unable to change that when a woman worth your heart shows up, you aren't available.

If you are in the midst of a personal crisis, you aren't available.

You want your fantastic woman to believe you are the best thing that has happened to her in a long time, yes?

You want her to come to you with a free and open heart, not in the middle of some crazy drama or major crisis, yes?

Then you must actually be available to become the best thing that has happened to her in a long time.

You must offer her a free and open heart, not a crazy drama or major crisis.

Offer her the gift of becoming that partner; offer her the gift of expecting and allowing her to be the same for you.

AVAILABILITY 3.0

If you have an unbroken pattern of dating people who are unavailable in any of the above ways, you aren't yet available. You are using unavailable people to prevent available people from loving you.

If you have an unresolved pattern of dating people who are cruel to you, you aren't yet available. You are using unavailable people to prevent available people from loving you.

If you have an unhealed pattern of turning away prospective partners because of "must haves" that have little to do with whether a woman could be a great partner, you aren't available. You are using crazy standards to prevent available people from loving you.

If you have an unaddressed pattern of pushing away people who try to get close to you, you aren't available. You are allowing fear and old stories and perhaps trauma to prevent available people from loving you.

If you have an unchanged pattern of losing yourself in relationships, you are less available than you believe. You are using relationships to reduce your anxiety and insecurity, and in the process, you are smothering your love interests.

If you are in a long-term on-again-off-again pattern with someone, you are not available. Even in the off-again periods. In fact, you are toxic to others. Stop that.

You expect your fantastic partner to come to you free of entanglements, savvy about her patterns, and able to connect without either cutting-and-running or totally glomming on and engulfing you, yes?

Prepare yourself to offer her the same gift. Why would she sign up for anything else? Why would you want her to?

SKILLS 1.0

If you were going to plant a garden, if you were going to let your lawn turn to prairie, if you were going to write a book or build a house or buy a car (or just drive a car) or feed yourself or plan a trip, you would need skills.

If you are gonna create a fantastic relationship, you are going to need skills.

Mad skills!

Genius skills!

Partnering skills!

You may have tried the “I kinda like you, you kinda like me, let’s sleep together and get some chemistry going” approach to founding a partnership. You may have ridden the wave of hormones for a year or two.

But at some point, skills outdistance chemistry.

Like when there are differences of opinion.

Like when there’s a conflict.

Like when one or both of you make a mistake and hurt feelings result.

Like when life, with its stresses and strains and demands and sorrows, intrudes on your passion pit or love nest.

And whether your relationship crashes and burns or gets more lift during those times comes down to skills.

Fortunately, the skills you will need are skills you can learn.

There’s science that tells us what those skills are.

Knowing what those skills are is the first step to acquiring them.

Knowing what the absence of those skills looks like and the impact of skills deficits will motivate you to learn the skills you need. They make the difference between crash and burn and wind-beneath-our-wings.

If you date someone who has a huge relationship skills deficit, you should keep searching. If you find yourself saying “they have potential” or “if only they would x,y,z, they would be great,” keep looking. Or double down with you skills and focus on whether you are being hyper-critical as a way of keeping love out.

Don’t be the person your amazing match passes over because you are still living with a huge, unrecognized skills deficit.

Let’s start with the bad habits that show up when you are suffering from relationship skills deficit.

Barriers to Fantastic Love: Skills Deficits

Let's start with the bad habits that show up when you are suffering from relationship skills deficit.

The foremost research on predicting relationship happiness and longevity makes clear that we can destroy great relationships pretty easily with these four practices identified by the researcher John Gottman:

Criticizing our partners

Responding to criticism with defensiveness

Responding to defensiveness or criticism with contempt

Stonewalling when things go awry

(And this kind of stonewalling has nothing to do with a drag bar revolt against a police raid – instead, it means totally shutting down and clamming up and refusing to interact with our Beloved, punishing her with silence, and checking out, abandoning her, withdrawing with no intention of returning to repair things.)

Almost everyone can recall falling into one or more of these habits at some point. They wouldn't have made it to the "top four" relationship killer list if they weren't so common. But because you are making yourself ready for a really great relationship, they are habits you'll need to transform.

The first step, of course, is knowing that criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling really are toxic.

This can be hard to accept if you've never known or practiced other kinds of engagement with people.

You may have all kinds of justifications for criticizing your partner or becoming defensive or snarky if they criticize you.

You may justify your criticizing by saying you are "helping" your partner to be a better person. You may justify your criticizing by saying it's humorous. You may justify your criticizing by saying it's cultural.

If that's true, you have some choices to make: hold on to these habits and never have an amazing, thrilling, awe-inspiring, loving relationship, or let go of them and become much better partner material.

Usually, when we let go of one habit, it helps to have another habit to take its place.

If you're going to stop drinking, you might do well to take up exercising, for example.

If we're going to stop practicing criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling, what do we need to work on instead?

Here's a four point model of habits and qualities to cultivate that will help take the edge off of any of these old, toxic habits.

It's called The Four Points of Balance, and is distilled from the work of David Schnarch, a psychotherapist.

What are the four points of balance?

Having a "Solid, Flexible Self"

Maintaining a "Quiet Mind and Calm Heart"

Practicing "Grounded Responding"

Practicing "Meaningful Endurance"

And then, there are these skills and qualities that correlate with relationship happiness and longevity:

Enhancing each other's love maps

Being open to influence

Accepting and making bids for connection

Making and accepting bids for repair

Practicing emotional responsiveness

Expressing appreciation

Let me translate Schnarch's rather abstract language and tell you what we get – and give our fantastic girlfriends --- when we can manage to be balanced in these ways.

Having a solid, flexible self means that you have some core values and practices. People can count on you in these areas. It also means that you aren't rigid and dogmatic in how these values are expressed or in imposing them on others.

For example, one of your core values may be keeping your word. When you make promises and agreements and commitments, you keep them. You expect the same from others. You also recognize that circumstances sometimes get in the way of keeping your commitments – or get in the

way of others keeping theirs. When that happens, you have the responsibility to acknowledge what's true, make adjustments, make amends to people you may need to make things right with, and accept apologies and efforts to set things right with you when others need you to do so. You are solid ---or consistent--- in keeping your word, and also flexible when circumstances require.

Maintaining a "Quiet Mind and Calm Heart" means that you work to keep yourself balanced and steady in the face of difficult or upsetting events. In short: you don't freak out about much.

Why is this important? Because in a partnership, you are experiencing the challenges of your daily life and also the challenges of daily life that affect your partner. How will you do when something difficult happens --- when she experiences a death in her family or gets a difficult diagnosis or loses a job? It's important that you learn to cultivate "quiet mind/calm heart" so that you can be present, helpful, and supportive in life's ups and downs, both for your own tranquility and so that your person knows that she can count on you, just as you would like to count on her.

Practicing "Grounded Responding" means that in your responses to others, you work from that place of "quiet mind/calm heart."

"Reacting" signifies "flying off of the handle" in a negative state in response to someone else's behavior or to circumstances. "Grounded responding" is an alternative. "Grounded responding" means that you stay centered and balanced, and respond to what's happening in ways that are relevant, kind, effective, and free of blame, criticism, and the impulse to control the other person, while also maintaining your values and boundaries. Imagine the difference between reacting to the revelation that your partner had an affair and responding to this in a grounded way; imagine the difference between reacting to the news that the woman you love has cancer and responding to this in a grounded way. Much of our experience --- and others' experience with us---is shaped by the ways we respond to situations, not simply by the situations themselves.

Practicing "Meaningful Endurance" means that we don't jump ship at the first sign of trouble. We hang in. We do our best to stay present and work things out if we have made a commitment to doing that.

It also means that we don't hang in beyond reason or tolerate abuse and no-win situations or exploitation. It means endurance needs to be meaningful.

We cultivate these four points of balance in the interest of developing secure attachments and offering the possibility of secure attachment to our partners.

From these four points of balance, we also have a chance to practice these behaviors that are associated with relationship happiness and longevity:

We are open to influence

We are able to repair

We are able to respond to bids for connection

We create shared meaning

We enhance our partner's "love map" and help her enhance yours

We overcome gridlock

We solve solvable problems

We turn toward each other instead of away

We nurture our fondness and admiration

We are on our partner's side, and refuse to see her as the enemy

From the Buddhist perspective, we water the seeds of trust and love and happiness in our partner and in ourselves, and do not water the seeds of fear and anger and distrust and other negative states, such as jealousy, dependency, abandonment.

Barriers to Finding Fantastic Love: Beliefs About Love

Some barriers to creating and finding fantastic love show up in beliefs about love. Here are some of the garbage beliefs we've been sold about love:

That sexual chemistry and love are the same thing.

That sexual chemistry is the foundation of love.

That we can tell in the first ten minutes – or the first three dates--- if someone is going to be (or not going to be) a great match for us.

That love is magical.

That love starts in emotions.

That we can't cultivate chemistry if we don't feel it right away.

That once we find The Woman, everything else falls in place.

That who we love and partner with is a matter of destiny or fate.

Are you uncomfortable?

You will need to challenge your current beliefs in order to change.

Doing what you have been doing will continue to get you what you've already gotten.

Shifting your beliefs about love will create the possibility of getting something different.

You are here because you long for something different.

I am asking you to think against the current of convention, of culture.

I am not asking you to give up love or chemistry or romance – not one iota of these!

I am asking you to explore your fundamental assumptions, to question the dominant paradigm.

The dominant paradigm still says it is not normal for women to love women, sexually, romantically, as mates and partners and spouses.

You have questioned that piece of the dominant belief system, yes?

It makes sense to question the dominant belief system about love itself.

You expect the fantastic woman you want to come to you with the possibility of loving you even if you don't fit her "type," even if your first date is awkward, even if you don't make all of her bells ring in the first ten minutes, yes?

I hope so.

Because what we have been taught to believe about how and who she will be, and how it will feel in the first ten minutes may lead us away from the best possible love. Let's hope she gives you a little time and a chance to shine after you have relaxed a bit.

Offer her the same gift.