

## The Stages of Love

This is why we do what we do

It is our belief that all people deserve to have **peace of mind** and that it is naturally available for every single one of us.

We also believe that kids deserve to **be happy**, to have **happy homes**, and to have **happy parents**.

So, this is what we do -

We work with individuals, couples, and parents to achieve **peace of mind**.

We work with them to eliminate barriers to their ability to express and **experience love** at any moment.

We work with them to provide **happy homes** for their kids.

At the Stages of Love, we offer a methodology that gives one access to their **natural ability** to heal themselves. To rid emotions, issues, and behaviors that interfere with **being happy** and maintaining **peace of mind**.

We work with couples and individuals pursuing a relationship, as well as those with other personal interests.



**The backbone of everything we do is this:**

Partners for Life - A Partner for Life is a partner committed to the aliveness of their significant other – they are also committed to everyone having better lives because they are in it.

In this training, I will walk you through the seven stages of love. These are stages that I have observed while working with hundreds of couples and thousands of individuals.

In observing these stages I have also identified that long term relationships are cyclical in nature. That is, a couple will go through these seven stages, and once completed they will go through them again – only differently, and several times during the life of the relationship. The cycle will run roughly once every seven to ten years.

Being able to identify the stage that you are in provides clarity to move through it. The ability to move through the stages gives you power and a profound resilience in dealing with daily life and whatever comes your way. Getting stuck in any stage brings with it anxiety, frustration, and irritation.



## **The Seven Stages of Love**

There is one thing that we all have in common in this relationship road of life, and that is: all of us, every one of us, has a past. The intention of THE STAGES OF LOVE is to alter the relationship you have with your past. Specifically, the relationship you have with your past about “past” relationships. Those relationships that, for one reason or another, are “not” the relationship you are in now.

Consider for a moment that none of your relationships were failures. Every relationship—especially the intimate ones; the ones where you fall in love— creates an opportunity, a possibility to shift, to transform, and to expand. The shift giving expression to who you really are—your true “SELF.” We identify your True Self as Pure Life Energy.

### **Black Jack!**

For the third hand in a row, “Black Jack!”, I said, to the man, rugged looking and about 40, in a baseball cap. Wow, he was really lucky today. And I guess I was too, as he tossed a black chip in my direction - a \$100 for me. It was about 5:45 A.M. on this Friday morning and I was dealing cards at a casino in Jackson, California.

The collapse of the housing bubble which led to the Great Recession, proved to be one of the most trying eighteen months of my life. I lost a significant corporate position with a nice income, my private practice was hit hard and I couldn’t keep up with my mortgage. I was doing everything I could to keep my house and to maintain my quality of life.

That is how I ended up here, at the Jackson Rancheria Casino Resort dealing cards and working from 10 P.M. until 6 A.M five nights a week. It was grueling, not just the wicked hours, but because I was also studying for my Real Estate Licensing exam on every break. During the day I was managing to keep my private practice alive and catching a bit of sleep whenever I could.

One thing about me and rough times - I do not let the grass grow under my feet. I will manage multiple things to survive a crisis and come out stronger on the other side. This critical time was no different except for one significant detail - I had fallen in love.

### **Friends or Lovers**

We had been friends - more like acquaintances for about ten years. Whenever our paths would cross we found ways to spend some time together. Even though it wasn’t a passionate love affair, it had a future that neither of us ever considered. We were just friends with some benefits. And then one day, what seemed to be out of nowhere, we started a conversation that resulted in a date.

So, this morning after the man in the cap hit his third Black Jack, I was heading to San Francisco two and a half hours away to spend time with my love interest. Our time would be limited because I need

to drive two and half hours **back** to the casino tomorrow night for my next shift. After that shift, ended at 6 A. M. Sunday morning I would drive just over an hour back to Sacramento, where I lived.

This had become my routine for several months.  
He is now my spouse.

How could I manage so many balls in the air along with the stress and fear of financial loss and possible ruin? Because I had fallen in love and **falling in love comes with perks**. These perks, though observed, are rarely investigated. Investigating them comes with insights that can stimulate actions in any intimate relationship. When stimulated, a couple can take their relationship to new heights.

### Stage 1: "H.I.G.H."

This is a very important stage, not only because it starts a romantic surge, but it's also the stage where love seems to be the most potent. Love seems the most real in this stage because there is a bonding that's taking place.

The body releases OXYTOCIN and DOPAMINE in large doses, so I call this stage "H.I.G.H." an acronym standing for: **H**ighly Intoxicated, **G**iddy, and **H**appy. Stage One is pretty much all biology - all hormones. It's a euphoric period filled with romance and intimacy most of the time.

Some of what you might notice during this stage is:

- You play up the similarities in the relationship with each other
- You play down any of the differences
- 80% of your thoughts in this stage are on the other person - missing them and desiring them
- Your inhibitions are lowered (later in the relationship you may even be embarrassed about the things you said or did as a result of those lowered inhibitions).
- You have more energy
- You need less sleep

We don't relate to it as driven by biology. This euphoric experience feels like it's going to last forever and it's beautiful as long as you know you are H.I.G.H.

This is a period when making big decisions for the relationship makes no sense, like moving in together, getting married, making babies, and burning bridges with other people in your life. It's not uncommon to cut other people out for a while, just don't burn the bridges.

People in this stage tend to think that the relationship is the real deal, and in our culture, we call it "falling in love". But it's a very hormone-driven stage that can be deceiving. As long as you understand the characteristics of this stage you will notice your impulses as simply impulses. Then you can enjoy it for what it is.



## **One but Separate**

Stage One is a kind of regression. It simulates the time when you were a baby bonding with your mother. Oxytocin is a bonding hormone released between Mother and baby – it is referred to as the cuddling hormone. That bonding makes you feel like one with everything.

Then as you develop and grow into a toddler, you start to experience yourself as separate. You now have boundaries and separateness, there is a “you” and a “them”.

The growing continues and now you have grown up and you have made it through puberty. There is this sense of loneliness that you want to fill. For some, it can be intense, while for others, your friends are enough – for a while. There does exist for almost everyone an anxiousness though, to experience ONENESS with somebody.

When you fall in love, Oxytocin gets released into your system again, and you begin to bond and develop trust with the object of your love. You regress to the experience of being united and one with everything, just as you did when you were a baby. Only this time you are conscious and have no memory of the first experience.

During this “in love” period, the body adds a dose of Dopamine creating rose-colored glasses and fire in the loins. It’s a beautiful experience that you crave. This regression, as an adult falling in love, is comforting, but you can’t stay there forever. The stage must be moved through if a nurturing and lasting relationship is to develop.

## **What to do**

If you are conscious, this period can be one of massive growth. Using the benefit of the hormones to gain insight into what matters to you most. Then accessing your higher and wiser self to create habits that will serve you for the rest of your life. Habits that will also serve the couple should it make it through Stage Three.

Stage One is the perfect opportunity to create truthfulness and togetherness for the new couple. It is a good time to develop rituals with one another. Rituals make the relationship strong and determine how much of a couple you really can be.

## **How Long Will It Last?**

Stage One will generally last anywhere between six months and three years the first time through. Stage One is blinding and biology is at play to encourage procreation. In fact, it is really what this stage is all about biologically. So, the stage can even go beyond the 3 years for younger and less experienced lovers.

Older, and more experienced lovers are not driven to procreate, so they will remain in Stage One for a lesser amount of time. Even though, with my spouse and I we managed keeping Stage One in existence for almost four and a half years. The first year, I had more Stage One qualities, while he picked up around the second year.

Whether it is your first relationship or not, every long term relationship will experience a version of stage one. And every long term relationship will run in cycles and each cycle of the relationship will have Stage One . It can last anywhere between a couple of weeks to a couple of months, rarely will a long-time partnership extend this stage any longer than that.

There might be many reasons for this, and one that seems most apparent is simply responsibility. There is more to be responsible for when we are established and that doesn't allow for being H.I.G.H. as long.



## **Stage Two: The “Coming Down” or “Pulling Away ” Stage**

### **The Emotional Body, Your Initial Bruise**

Consider that a human being is made up of various domains - bodies if you will. The physical domain, the spiritual domain, and the emotional domain. Said another way, the body, the mind, and the heart and soul.

### **The Physical Body**

The physical body is a loud domain, that is, it cries out for what it needs and wants. And because it is so loud and so obviously necessary to one's survival - it requires and gets a lot of attention. While the other domains get little attention, and in some cases are completely ignored.

Our time is spent relating to the physical body in the following ways:

1.     \* Managing its overall well being
2.     \* Dealing with its waste
3.     \* Keeping it clean
4.     \* Keeping it moving

The mind and spiritual bodies do get attention, but not nearly as much as they need. It may be our culture that drives our attention to the spiritual and of course the mind is the gateway to our brains and the capacity to learn, grow, adapt, and develop.

The backbone of THE STAGES OF LOVE is our relationship to the Emotional Body and for now, we will focus primarily on it.

Amazingly, our emotions impact every aspect of our existence while getting very little examination. They influence our actions, our goals, who we interact with, and who we don't. Emotions get activated in our relationships very much like habits. Not just our relationships with people, but our relationships to ANYTHING and EVERYTHING.

Because Emotions are wired up in patterns exactly like habits, they get triggered and your reactions are automatic, playing out the same way every single time. The way that they play out determines the kind of life you can have and the kind of intimate relationships you will maintain.

### **It's All in the Wiring**

Emotions get so little attention and examination even though they have so much impact. Why so little attention? Because they aren't generally understood and most of us are trapped by them. After all, if they are automatic, what does will-power, decision or choice have to do with them? Nothing.

Let's look at a possible way the Emotional Body gets shaped and developed.

### **YOUR INITIAL BRUISE**

As you grew up, fitting into the family paradigm was critical. Your survival depended on it. You did what you needed to do and acted as you needed to so as to fit. At the very least you played your part, your character and that got developed by trial and error. Of course, I am speaking generally here, there are exceptions to this logic.

When your group (family) approved, then that was your emotional signal for this is who you are supposed to be. When your group disapproved, then that was your emotional signal that that was not the way you are supposed to be. You adjusted accordingly.

Until one day something happened (your Initial Bruise) and whatever that something was, it felt like you were broken and you could no longer fit within your group. Your survival seemed threatened. This would be highly stressful for anyone, but for a child it is traumatic.

The first time you experience betrayal, rejection, or simply being a disappointment is the Initial Bruise and it's traumatic. Your emotional self is BRUISED. With the Initial Bruise comes the introduction of your self-image. Before the Initial Bruise, there was no need for a self-image, you just were.

As a baby, you were one with everything. As a toddler you were learning how you should be by adjusting and readjusting with the input from your group. But now you are faced with the Initial Bruise and you have a self-image and it's not necessarily a positive one. You might feel broken or left out.

That will now cause your projected image to get designed. Your projected image stems from seeing yourself as insufficient, therefore you need an image, an image to project - one that is pleasing and fits into your group.

You could design your projected image in a number of ways, you might design it to keep other people away; you might even design it to be close to everyone. For example, keeping people away, for you, might feel safe - whereas, keeping people close might be how you feel safe.

Who you think you are, are these images, they are not who you really are. As part of the defense strategy, no one is allowed to see your self-image, you do not want to be exposed. Life becomes a game of sharpening your projected image so that you feel protected.

You start to lose track of who you really are because you are convinced that you are your self-image while hiding behind the projected one. Keep in mind, from this point on, your self image and your projected image are not YOU. They are images of you. You will begin to notice now that we (people) spend our whole lives working on these images as though they are us.

Life continues on while you juggle a self-image and at least one projected image. You start school and begin interacting with others at a greater rate than ever before. You are being thrown outside of your comfort zone and your understanding. Survival mode kicks in and you start adjusting your projected image to endure the newest challenge. Fitting in, being accepted, or at the very least blending in enough, is the true purpose of your projected image.

### **Someone Who Understands Me**

At a point in your life, you will meet someone that you are attracted to. What might be next is to fall in love with them.

#### **Or do you?**

I assert your projected image falls for the other's projected image. As you continue the love dance you will likely start to design a projected image just for that one person, in fact, for many that's what love is. Love seems like you should create a "self" to align with your love interest.

That is just another image to join your cast of characters. This cast of characters collectively acts like they are you, creating a false self. It all just seems like you. In reality, though, when your True Self gets revealed, then you will see clearly what love is.

So, to recap, you have a self-image, at least three projected images, an image of your mate, and an image of the couple. With both of you, there are at least twelve images getting juggled.

No wonder relationships are difficult.

### **The Revealing Questions**

You are asking these questions:

- Who are we?
- Who are you?
- Who am I?



The Dopamine and Oxytocin are subsiding in your body, and you are coming down off of their influence. Reality is showing up, you've lost yourself in the other, and now is the time to regain your individuality.

For some people, this brings up a lot of insecurities. You might even try very hard to hold on to the oneness and that could have your relationship get stuck in this stage.

Moving through stage two and not holding on is necessary in order to determine a healthy "we". For that to fully happen, there needs to be a reconciling of your self-image with your projected image. When that reconciliation happens you will start relating to your True Self more often.

### **Bringing Them Together**

In childhood, you and everyone deal with uncomfortable situations and traumas. Trauma is simply that which seems unbearable to the one experiencing it. We develop personalities and characteristics that protect us. The projected image process is natural, and we barely notice it happening.

These different personalities don't always work well in human interactions after childhood. Especially in our intimate relationships. During Stage Two, you started to deal with this personality of yours, and

its various characteristics (projected images) that you've developed. And dealing with them blinds you to who you really are, the True Self we have been trying to get to.

These characteristics can be stumbling blocks in a lot of relationships. During Stage One, you feel like things are going to be great together and forever. You forget that who you think you are in love with is actually an image that you created in your own mind, a "fantasy dance" supported by your brain. Not to say the person isn't real, of course not, but the image of the person that you hold is not real. When reality sets in and you have to reconcile what you "thought" versus what is - this can be challenging.

Another realization that you will have to reconcile is that the person you are in a relationship with is not "you". They don't see things your way, perhaps they don't agree with your perceptions. It can bring up defense mechanisms and the need to be right. Defending your personality images in an intimate relationship rarely goes well. At least not nearly as well as for those who aren't doing that.

As you move into Stage three you would really want to understand that a Partner for Life is interested in our being ourselves - our true selves. That partner would want for themselves and their partner to be free of any obstacles in the way of that, even if that obstacle is each other.

### **Stage 3: The "Reality" or "Choice" Stage**

This stage is LOADED. Biologically, you may feel chemically depleted, exhausted and emotionally hungover. The hormones subsided and you are faced with reality. This can be a confusing and an awkward stage.

- Annoyances start showing up; what once may have been "cute" is now irritating.
- The differences are now being played up and more difficult to accept.
- The similarities are now being played down.
- If resentments weren't dealt with powerfully and forgiven when they arose, then this is the stage where they take root and cause issues.
- Because you were uninhibited during Stage One there might be some embarrassment now. You may have shared or done things you wish you hadn't.

Half of all relationships end naturally in stage 3. Of the remainder, some will be well-grounded, continuing through the future stages and cycles. The rest, about 25% will become STUCK, creating a future of some or all of the following:

- Distance
- Arguing
- Make Up Sex
- A build-up of regret and resentment



- Broken agreements and promises

Sometimes couples will try to keep the relationship alive even when it isn't fulfilling. They just want the connection so badly. It is in this stage that the real work begins for each individual. If the emotional bruises have not been dealt with it is in this stage that they will get hit. The pain that gets caused might be blamed on the partner who is possibly hitting those bruises unintentionally.

Take a look at a few examples:

### **John and Mary**

Almost all couples that come to me are either developing Stage Four and beyond, or they are stuck in Stage Three. And this was the case with John and Mary - they were stuck in Stage Three.

They met almost 20 years ago and married very soon after they met. Stage One for them didn't have the same electricity that many couples experience - theirs was more subtle. As they looked back this was a concern for them both. They thought it might be an indicator of not being right for one other.

Mary was already uncertain of herself. She had very few dating experiences and mostly found that she couldn't count on guys. They were wishy-washy and this trait was hard for her to be with. Meeting John, though, was a different story. He was somebody that could be counted on. When he said he'd be somewhere, he would be, and when he said he'd do something, he did it.

### **The Dark Side**

She was impressed and her sense of survival kicked in. "This guy is perfect for me, he will take care of me, I won't be alone. I will have children with him and they will be well taken care of," she thought to herself.

Her infatuation was short-lived as she started to see that the traits she so appreciated came with a dark side. His expectations were very high and he was demanding of her. He expected that she would tend to household duties while he attended to his long workdays. Sometimes he would be short with her about things being messy and even not as clean as he liked.

He shared in household chores and managing the kids, but most of it fell on her. And she didn't appreciate his controlling nature. This awareness though, never got taken seriously. She thought she was overthinking and treated it like it would take care of itself.

He, on the other hand, was very much in love. Even though she didn't do everything he thought she should, it was easy for him to let go of his irritation. She gave him the right responses and all indication that they were good and she was happy enough. She continued to see "red-flags", but ignored them as they had their first child together.

### **Not on the Same Page!**

John was not included in her fearful thoughts and uncertainties. It takes a lot of courage to express these kinds of fears with your partner. Left unexpressed, it can turn into what might feel like a disaster. An unrecoverable event.

She noticed he seemed to dismiss her opinions, and if she tried to argue her position or at least get taken seriously, she got shot down. He clearly had the power in their relationship. This happened so often for her that she quit communicating. In her words, "I just could never win."

And as Mary learned years later, it's not just courage but an art of communication that was needed. She would have to develop her communication style if she wanted to be heard.

### **Not all Bad**

There were many good times and they had their second child. But there was a lot that she still wasn't saying. She was never sexually satisfied, she tells me now, but found it a worthwhile trade off to have someone she could count on. With other guys before, she was always afraid of being left alone. John, though, she never felt that way and she admired him. She just was not sexually attracted to him, and said she never had been.

John says he is sexually satisfied and just figured her lack of intense response or eagerness was just her low sexual appetite. He didn't care - he loved her and it was enough for him. He was content.

Now, 20 years later, she wants more. She wants a life where she can really enjoy her sexuality, she wants to be heard, she wants a financial existence that seems more stable. John, being self-employed, would have big cash flow ups and downs. She found these scary and hard to tolerate. She'd beg him to take a regular job, but he was an entrepreneur and couldn't see himself doing anything else, so he'd refuse.

### **Courage**

He didn't realize that her experiences of fear were felt so deep, nor did he realize that a day would come that she would call it a "deal-breaker". Neither could see it. He was just being himself, the forceful entrepreneur, honest and forthright. She was just being someone who needed stability and security. It was confusing for Mary, because John was that, stable and secure, and at the same time her financial security felt threatened.

For some, you might see the answer that John get an employer, a regular kind of job. For others, you might see that Mary should have responded to the red flags much sooner. The truth is - both are correct. If Mary had responded to the red flags, they would not be stuck. They would have moved

into the next stage. If John had changed jobs - who knows? Perhaps that alone would have made Mary feel important and heard.

Not everyone is courageous enough to speak their hearts. You might have a high tolerance for unworkability too, which will also make it less likely for you to confront difficult situations. And if you are passive in nature, you might think you are making requests when in reality you are being passive-aggressive.

John chose Mary, by choosing her he was able to include all of her personality characteristics. Mary never chose John, she wanted him to be different than he was and she didn't feel like he would hear her. She chose a lifestyle, she chose children and family, just not John.

It is healthy to question your choices, even the big ones.

### **But Now What?**

No matter how you got stuck - stuck is stuck and it is not comfortable for anybody. It doesn't have to mean the relationship is over. On the contrary, even if you think it feels too late don't call it quits - at least not yet.

Mary is angry. Why? Because she is projecting her lack of courage onto John, making it his fault that she couldn't speak up in a way to be heard. After all if he wasn't so controlling and dismissive she would have been able to speak up.

John feels betrayed. Why? Because he always listens. He would have changed anything to make her more secure. It feels like she set him up for failure. Her passive-aggressive communication made him think everything was fine. It made him think she understood his career choice and was on board. He only controlled what he felt like made a difference for their survival.

To move through Stage Three, John and Mary need a new way to communicate. They might even need a good fight. Doing this on their own will likely not be fruitful. They need a coach, one that can lead them through this communication and possible argument. If they can't afford one, then a counselor at their church might be good for them.

They both need to uncover their Deepest Desire, they need to reclassify their own WHY for being in this relationship. Letting go of their perceptions of the past and looking at right now without those. The answer to Why today will not likely be the same as 20 years ago.

You will get introduced to this work in later chapters.

This work will open a gateway, freeing them to participate in Stage Three. They will be able to choose the relationship in a whole new way, and choose each other too. The choice they make will either lead to the next 20 years together as a family, or it will lead to dissolving the marriage and

building a family for their kids within a new paradigm. One where they love each other as co-parents rather than lovers. In either case, love is present and everybody wins.

### **I remember the moment we stepped into Stage Three:**

A couple that were my clients of mine for a few years were getting married. They invited me to their wedding and opened the invitation to include my then boyfriend, Rafael.

Now, the wedding wasn't just any kind of wedding. It was a full on African wedding planned in Sudan, Africa. I had every intention of attending and had about six months to plan the trip.

When I received the invitation, I was spending the night with Rafael. I looked over at him and asked, "Hey, what do you think about taking a trip with me to Africa in about six months?" I'll never forget the look on his face. It was a look of complete surprise mixed with a little horror, and a dash of confusion. "Africa!", he exclaimed. Why Africa? I took the time to explain. He didn't seem interested and said, "Hmmm, I don't know, we can talk about it."

Today, that thought still makes me laugh and smile.

It wasn't nearly as funny then, but I realized it was a big ask of somebody when your relationship is in Stage Two. Not as many hormones, all the internal questions about having a future together or not. Trying to figure out who we were individually and as a couple defined by our relationship. I didn't regret asking him, but I backed away from it pretty quickly.

We set it aside, and went to sleep. Nothing more was said about it, nor was there anything more to say.

### **The Next Morning**

It was in the early morning and Rafael had gotten up. He was in the bathroom brushing his teeth. My eyes were open and I was laying in bed staring at the ceiling. I was very content and comfortable. I was reflecting on the night before and decided I'd go ahead and make my plans for Africa on my own. Not a problem, no feelings of rejection or regret.

"Thomas", I heard Rafael call out. I looked up and saw him with his toothbrush in his hand. He was leaning against the door jam - *James Dean style*. His eyes connected directly with mine and a serious, yet compassionate look was across his face. "Let's go to Africa", he said in a soft, gentle but masculine tone.

I grinned really big and said, "Really?"

Today my eyes dampen and a warm glow travels throughout my body even as I remember it. We were in Stage Three that day. He chose me, and I had chosen him. We chose this relationship and in that moment it had a future.

How do I know that was the day we entered Stage Three? Because, it was from that day forward that things started to change.

### **Friction**

Stages 1 through 3 are the periods of determination. You are determining if this relationship is a fit or not. These are the dating stages, where the intention is getting to know one another in many capacities. Stage One reveals the more playful side of an individual, their varying degrees of trustworthiness, and their creativity. Stage two reveals one's self-image and the projected image(s). In Stage Three you will see how you and your partner handle difficult emotional experiences.

It is also the stage where becoming a true Partner for Life gets real. Your True Self starts to emerge.

Because the choice is made, each of you will probably get more relaxed. In that more relaxed state there is opportunity for some friction. Friction is caused whenever you rub up against each other with different ideas, opinions or points of view.

You will know exactly what they are when they show up. These are the areas where you might have quarrels or arguments. Here are some common friction points you might experience:

- ~Fighting about household chores
- ~Having different ways of doing things
- ~Arguing about money
- ~Friends knowing more than you think they should
- ~The way you or they drive
- ~In-laws meddling in your business

There are, of course, many others, and every couple has their own.

When Rafael and I went to Africa we learned a great deal about one another. You learn a lot about each other if you can travel together. Packing in itself was an experience. I carry a lot of stuff. He prides himself in packing very light. We had a bit of tug of war about it. He wanted me to take less and I wouldn't budge.

When we got there he was very happy I had the stuff I had. He used much of it. In his defense though, if we didn't have it, he would easily have done without it. This was a major difference in our personalities that didn't show up until that trip. It caused a little friction.

Friction has you asking yourselves, “what can I tolerate? What can I tolerate within myself? What will I tolerate in my partner? What can I tolerate with us as a couple? As you answer these questions you will notice where you might be willing to compromise or not. If you don’t answer these questions, if you find yourself pushing them aside, then you are a good candidate to get stuck in this stage.

As a same sex couple we had to be on our best behavior because we were in the Middle East. It’s funny how it feels when you have to pretend you’re not “together”. During the evenings and early mornings when we were alone we took advantage of bonding. Some of that bonding time was also used to deal with some of the friction that came up while we were out. When anything would happen that might rub one of us the wrong way with the other, we couldn’t express it, we had to play it off. The bruised parts of our Emotional Bodies got hit multiple times.

Other parts of the trip that sparked friction included each one of us becoming **very** sick. He got sick first for a couple days, and I took care of him. Then it was me who was sick the next few days, and he took care of me. We finally got better and we were relieved, for about a day, then BAM! Both of us were sick and we had to weakly take care of each other.

He was convinced that the resort food made us sick, while I was absolutely certain, that was not the case. He had a couple of heated discussions with the resort manager before we left. I was not comfortable about that. I felt that he was wrong.

There were lots of these moments on this three week adventure. There were some controlling characteristics showing up in his personality that I hadn’t seen before. He told me that he found me more resistant to his thoughts and ideas than I had been before.

We were in Stage Three all right, there was no doubt about it.

Healing the emotional body is ultimately what you are after in this stage. And if you, like us, find yourself hit with lots of friction, all at one time, then it can catch you off guard. But it can also give the relationship a real advantage. It throws you into the defining questions rather quickly.

### Healing

This simply means being your True Self more often and most of the time. How do you do that? You do that by reconciling your Self Image and your Projected Image(s) with your True Self. Those moments of friction can have you throw a wall up. Once you deal with the questions though, you can tear down just as fast. Every time you tear one down, you get closer to who you really are.

Being your True Self allows for you to be exactly the way you are and it allows for your partner to be the way they are too. Looking for any change in your partner is a sure sign that unless you clearly choose him/her exactly as they are then your future will likely be turbulent or silent - and both are killers of long-lasting love.

A true acceptance of your own and your partner's individuality and separateness is critical. When and if this comes to pass, then a foundation upon which a mature, loving relationship can be based materializes. That is the fulfillment of stage three.

### **Stuck**

At least 25% of all couples are stuck in Stage Three. You either haven't done the internal work necessary to become a Partner for Life or you don't have the courage to move on. Both require courage.

Either way stuck is stuck and it is unbearable.

Getting unstuck requires a reconciliation of your Self-Image and your Projected-Image with your True Self. How do you reconcile?

1. Get to the source of your initial bruise.
  - a. One of the first memories you have of betrayal, rejection, or simply being a disappointment is the Initial Bruise and it's traumatic. Your emotional self is BRUISED. With the Initial Bruise comes the introduction of your Self-Image.
  - b. The Self-Image isn't even necessary until the bruise.
  - c. This image of yourself covers over your True Self, pretending to protect it.
2. None of us want the world to see this wounded self, so we develop our Projected Image (a social mask so to speak). What was the Projected Image you put on to hide your Self-Image? Remember your Self-Image isn't usually positive so you want to hide it. And by the way for some of you it can even be that wounded self. The one most of us are covering up, can for some be the one they project. Determine the tone of your Projected Image.

Some possible Projected Images you might be using:

- a. The cool guy or cool gal
- b. The popular one
- c. Super friendly
- d. The humorist
- e. The Overachiever
- f. The Martyr
- g. The Bully
- h. The Control Freak
- i. The Self Basher
- j. The People Pleaser
- k. The introvert
- l. The extravert
- m. The social butterfly



- n. The Wounded One
- o. The Helpless and Needy

### 3. What is your True Self?

- a. Your Deepest Desire in simple terms is your True Self. It is the part of you that wants to come out but needs “something” to do that. You will need to ask the right questions to get in touch with it.

### 4. The Right Questions:

- a. Sit quietly, and get in touch with your feelings.
  - i. What do you desire emotionally?
  - ii. What do you ache for emotionally?
  - iii. What does your heart yearn for? If your heart had a voice what would it say?

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Your Deepest Desire now needs to be expressed in order for it to be fulfilled. There is no way you can have what you really want, your Deepest Desire unless you find ways to give it away. You will need to give it away. **Giving it away, that is your True Self.**

For example, **my** Deepest Desire is Peace of Mind. Making sure that those around me are peaceful is one way that I can give it away. By making their lives peaceful fulfills my Deepest Desire. Another way I give it away is by doing the work I do. My avocation is also my vocation.

I let go of the little things, having to be right, getting upset and anything other than being peaceful.

Your Deepest Desire and giving it away will become natural for you too. When I refer to your true self and who you really are - this is it!

## Stage 4: The Brain Dance Stage

### Harmony

This is a magnificent stage and lives in the background for the life of the relationship. Because of that I consider it the most important of all seven stages. You cannot have the beauty of this stage without powerfully moving through stage three. When you are stuck in stage three, stage four cannot come alive.

By now, you've chosen the relationship, and stages 1-3 are complete. Stage Four is the Brain Dance where the couple does not minimize individuality, on the contrary, it thrives on individuality. The couple promotes it because that's what gives them their personality.

There's your individuality, then there is theirs, and that combined becomes the couple. You and your partner begin to think alike. Thinking alike doesn't mean always agreeing, it means honoring your differences of opinion. You are in sync, a harmony, a rhythm to the dance. Team players, playmates.

### **Attending To**

A relationship is like a garden. In order for it to be beautiful, it has to be cared for. It has to be weeded, sometimes more than once or twice a day. It needs attention, loving attention.

A relationship has its own kind of weeds, and those are regrets and resentments. On a regular basis, we must remove regret and resentment, and we do that by bringing acknowledgment and forgiveness.

Love Bytes are perfect for nurturing Stage Four, but it isn't enough. If you want to increase your sex life and deepen intimacy start being nice to your partner more often and authentically. Pay attention to the Sliding Door Moments (coined by Dr. John Gottman). Not to manipulate, but to cause the release of dopamine, oxytocin and adjusting serotonin levels. These generate feel good hormones that I call sex cocktails and they lead to trust and closeness.

Think of an elevator door - it is a sliding door. Have you ever missed an elevator? How about just making one? That is how you want to think of a Sliding Door Moment. A moment of opportunity that you catch. It could easily be missed, but you catch it. When you catch them, they build trust in your relationship. Those moments you give your partner something above the usual every day - a particular kind of generosity. One that reminds them why they are with you and that they are important to you.

It was a beautiful sunny morning in August. My spouse and I got out of bed and though it wasn't our predetermined date night, Rafael suggested we each draw a Love Byte card.

"Good idea," I said, "let's do that."

Generally, when we draw Love Bytes, we don't share them with one another and that was the case today. Mine was easy. "Sit through a program with him that he enjoys, and that I don't, and be really good about it."

My day was jam-packed. I had clients starting at 8 a.m. and pretty much on the hour until dinner time. I prepared and we had dinner around 6. With one more couple to be with afterward, I finished for the night about 8 p.m., and I was wiped out.

All I could think about was brushing my teeth, washing up, and going to bed.

When I went inside there he was watching a television program that was at the very bottom of my list. In other words, a program I despise. I fulfilled my Love Byte. Yippee! Now I couldn't keep my eyes open. Tomorrow is gym day at 6 a.m. and my first session at 8, I really needed to sleep.

I told him good night and rolled over.

Rafael disappeared. I wasn't sure where the heck he went and was too sleepy to investigate. I started nodding off when my cell phone rang and it was him. "What the heck," I thought and answered the phone. "Is everything alright?" "Yes", he said, but I need your help." "Okay," I replied, "where are you?" "I'm downstairs in the apartment."

We had a vacant apartment under our house that's fully furnished.

"Oh boy, what has he done now," I thought.

"Is it important?" I asked him, hoping he would say no. "Yes," he said. "Okay, I'm on my way."

So I threw on my robe and grabbed some flip flops and worked my way outside and down the stairs to the apartment.

When I opened the door - WOW!!!!

He had candles lined all the way down the hallway along with rose petals to the bedroom and onto the bed with a big heart made of the same rose petals in the middle. It was really spectacular.

Music was playing. And he was laying across the bed grinning ear to ear - it was a sight.

Meanwhile - here I am looking at all of this, and very impressed. This is SO not his way most of the time, but I am exhausted. "Are you kidding me? What is expected here," I thought.

I praised his efforts and then asked him, "What was your Love Byte?" He told me it was to have sex somewhere we had never had before. Oh oh, I thought, there is an expectation here.

I continued with the praises and at the same time tried to muster up some energy and excitement around the whole thing. He went way beyond just the Love Byte, he got very creative, and that just can't be ignored. I went into the bathroom and splashed my face with cold water, bathed quickly and came out a new man.

There was no way I was going to let myself dampen his efforts. Tired or no-tired, this was important.

We are in Stage Four and Stage Four requires a lot of attention to the metaphoric garden of our relationship. This is also a Sliding Door Moment where I can allow my exhaustion to win, or bring my A-game to having love win.

Love Won!  
Our relationship won!

A side note here - if sex is on your agenda and you are over 40, it's a good idea to give your partner an early in the day heads up - even if it screws up the surprise. Just sayin!

### **Rhythms of The Heart**

During the Brain Dance, you never want to go against the other. If one of you tries to control the dance, he or she will destroy it. Think of it this way: two different views of the same reality adds a level of depth and dimension to that reality.

By the same token, two different rhythms of the heart add depth and dimension to the Brain Dance. Rhythms of the Heart simply means the way one feels loved. We don't always interpret feelings of love the same way. We have different ways we experience and express our love.

Learning your partner's Rhythm of the Heart is a way to build a long-lasting experience of love. When you and your partner get to your Deepest Desires, encouraging it to be fulfilled is your couple's Rhythm.

It is simply loving as your True Selves. Expressing and giving away your Deepest Desire to your partner as your Unique Contribution.

That's your True Self living it's true purpose and that is the Rhythm of the Heart.

**Coaches note: This is the backbone of your coaching relationship for the first 6 months**

Teach your partner the Rhythm of your Deepest Desire by learning his or hers. Everyone can relate to all Deepest Desires, but one will stand out as the one that really makes your brain dance. It's the one you cannot live without. No matter yours and no matter theirs all Deepest Desires can dance together.

My Deepest Desire is Peace of Mind and my spouse's is Approval; that is to be Approved of. I make it a point to be a Love Finder not a Fault Finder with my spouse. I realize the importance of keeping his approval rating high. He, on the other hand, is peaceful in nature and will make it a point to encourage that for me. I can be wound up pretty tight sometimes.

It's this attention to each other that has Stage Four very real for our relationship. The Deepest Desire brings about the Brain Dance and the Brain Dance brings about intimacy. Intimacy means to be vulnerable; to feel neither superior nor inferior; to be authentically present.

Deepak Chopra says, *"When you are truly being intimate, you enter a state of timelessness – an orgasmic, ecstatic state of oneness. To have intimacy, there is an unfoldment of surrender – where you have no desire to manipulate/cajole/seduce the other person."*

IN-TO-ME-SEE, that is intimacy and that is the True Self. If you lack harmony in the Brain Dance or you are holding onto resentments or regrets, intimacy isn't available.

### Intimacy

Intimacy is vital to maintaining healthy social lives. If you avoid intimacy, you might be dealing with an underlying fear. This can disrupt a relationship or get in the way of even having one. If this is you then you want to quickly resolve it. Contrary to what you might think, it can disappear for good. Getting it out of the way will allow you to be close to your partner, or even create a relationship if that is what you want.

We thrive on close personal relationships with others. While intimacy evokes images of romantic relationships, it occurs in all close relationships, and confusingly those relationships, though not close, can feel intimate in given moments.

There are four types of intimacy:

**Experiential Intimacy:** When people bond during leisure activities. People may "sync up" their actions in teamwork or find themselves acting in unison.

Example: My brothers and I did business training courses together for a number of years. We started demonstrating the same zeal for results and fun in producing them. Our closeness went beyond blood.

**Emotional Intimacy:** When people feel safe sharing their feelings with each other, even uncomfortable feelings and opinions..

Example: A couple confides in me as their coach. They share deep seated emotional experiences allowing me to be part of their solution. There is an intimate bond and a deep trust.

**Intellectual Intimacy:** When people feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions, even when they disagree.

Example: One of my friends and I have very different views about the current political climate. We debate them often and don't feel the need to "win" the argument. We both know it's a safe space to express ourselves freely.

**Sexual Intimacy:** When people engage in sensual or sexual activities. When people use the word “intimacy,” they are often referring to this type.

Example: Engaging in foreplay, touching, kissing, massage, loving caress and often intercourse.

Feeling close and safe with our partner can be the ultimate of intimate experience. The communication needed to feel safe and vulnerable is often where couples can use some help. We only live once as far as we know, so don't waste any time to get this worked out.

Even when neither of you fear intimacy, a couple may still have trouble opening up to one another. The following suggestions may allow you and your partner to grow closer:

**Be patient.** Trust-building is often a slow process. Intimacy is not a race.

Start with the easy stuff. If you find it easier to talk about the future than the past, then start by sharing your dreams and goals. As trust builds, you will find it easier to talk about more difficult topics.

Work on the **courage** to express your needs. Are you someone who needs a lot of time alone? Are you highly physical and require lots of physical touch? How often do you like to have sex? Misunderstandings can be reduced if you tell your partner plainly what you want or need. Don't assume your desires are obvious. And don't think telling them one time will be enough.

I have some very specific preferences and can't begin to count the number of times I've had to express them to my spouse. But rather than give into irritation I simply repeated myself. It took a few years, but now he's got it.

**Respect** each other's differences. Even the most intimate partners have their own identities. You and your partner do not need to agree on everything in order to love each other and to express it.

## **Stage 5: The Co-Creating Stage**

### **Stage 5 Forming a Foundation for the Future**

Having discovered your Deepest Desire is now going to pay off. This stage, when it occurs naturally, happens around year four through six. It makes itself evident and grows from a deep and meaningful foundation.

This stage is where the lights come on, and you are looking to express your True Selves in the world beyond just being a couple. It doesn't have to be life changing but rather life fulfilling. Projects that express your relationship.

People who have meaning and purpose in their lives are happier, feel more in control, and get more out of what they do each day. They also experience less stress, anxiety, and depression.

Scientific research shows that having a connection to something bigger than ourselves: a religious belief, or a spiritual side to our lives, makes us happier and healthier. And projects branching out of our deepest connections express who we are in the eyes of others.

Martin Seligman – the founder of Positive Psychology – describes meaning as a vital component of happiness and well-being.

Studies of couples who believe their lives have meaning show a direct correlation to well-being. There lives within each one of us a passion, a motivation to make some kind of difference, to leave a mark, a legacy. Although finding meaning is about connecting to something beyond ourselves, it also seems to tap into something fundamental within all of us and show up in activities we design and develop together.

For some people this becomes obvious early on – for example, a calling to teach or to become a doctor or to follow a particular faith, or a calling to raise a family. For many, however, there is a search for meaning that can take a lifetime. Sometimes a practice such as meditation can help us become more in touch with our feelings and our deeper selves.

The following statements will become real for you as Stage Five evolves:

- **Life is precious.** The benefit we have over all other life on earth is the conscious awareness of our “Self,” our “life.” We don’t just breathe, eat, and sleep. We have the ability to use our talents and desires in fantastic ways. We want, we need, to accomplish something. We may not be sure what that something is, but it exists and we want to investigate it.
- **Life, as we know it, is short.** When we are young, time has little meaning for us other than to grow, learn, and expand, that is a child’s job. Throughout our adult years, life fills up with the process of living. Time for reflection has to be consciously taken; it’s rarely available, otherwise. And at some point, mortality stares you in the face. The time to accomplish is now.
- **Something bigger.** We are a very small part of a very large universe. When we die, most of the other 8 billion people on earth won’t notice. We are part of a large cosmic existence though, and we are connected. We want our connection to account for something that contributes in some way, big or small.
- **We are unique.** We are part of a larger whole, and yet we are still unique. Everything on earth is unique in one way or another. There is no one else who has the exact qualities that you do, and no one ever will. You will make a unique contribution on this planet, one that makes a difference and leaves a mark.



- **Being truthful and loving matters.** Loving me teaches those around me to love me. Loving “me” authentically has love experienced, expressed, and expanded around me. The couple you are is that expression, experience, and expansion in reality.

Since my early twenties I have been involved in physical fitness. Not body building or competition but maintaining a good physique is important to me. My spouse, Rafael has had similar standards for nearly as long. Even though that is something we share it isn't Stage Five co-creating. We brought that to our relationship and sharing it is a kind of ritual for us. So, common interests are awesome and important, but they don't necessarily constitute co-creating. They are likely rituals. This only matters because what you bring into the relationship will likely not have an “our” experience.

Later in our relationship when we watched the documentary, “What the Health”, we were both very surprised by the impact the movie had on us. The message became important and we chose to start eating 100% plant based.

What? No meat? No fish? No chicken? Oh my gosh! What the heck do we eat? A salad is fine, but come on.

The journey turned into an incredible bonding moment for us. We really had to start creating our new lifestyle from scratch.

We got very creative in our cooking and shopping, it's been a fun journey. This was our first Stage Five co-creation and that was four years ago, and it is still going strong. Since then we have:

- ~done **Short Term rentals** together,
- ~put travel as one of our top priorities
- ~planning activities to be closer to our families and especially grandchildren.

As you can hear in my share, a couple's purpose can be life changing, but it doesn't have to be. Life fulfilling, though, is what you're after. There are many projects you and your partner will find through the years. Like ours they might be both life changing and fulfilling, but most will be life fulfilling. This is very important for your relationship's health and vitality.

### **Here Are Some of The Things Other Couples Have Done:**

“My spouse worked for a city utility company for more than twenty years. That gave us an opportunity for an early retirement given she had started so young. We sold our home, bought an RV and traveled the country. After we got our fill we then settled in a small community right on the coast.”

“The answer to this question has changed over the years. In the past, we have done animal rescue. At one point we worked to raise awareness about the rise in antibiotic-resistant infections in mainstream society.”

“Last year, my husband and I donated some weeping willow trees to a local park that had lost some over the winter. I feel like my life has meaning when I am able to act in accordance with my beliefs.”

“Knowing that we will soon be teaching people the science of happiness through our 12-step program and change not only where we live but hopefully the whole culture and eventually the world.”

“We were brought up in religious families, and although we don’t follow any religion now, we are spiritual people. We’re all part of a bigger web of life and much more interconnected than we realize. For us, meaning and purpose come from doing a job that we feel makes a positive contribution, trying to be great parents – and doing what we can to care for the world around us – the environment, other people, and so on.”

“My wife and I write music together and perform. Our children are grown. This keeps us close and gives us a sense of purpose. Our lives are happy and full.”

*“Going the wrong way is what took me to the right way – just go” ~Thomas Kuster*

If this stage is ignored, the couple will experience boredom, insignificance, and a lack of real passion. This is very common and it is recoverable. You will have to know your Deepest Desire as an individual first, and your partner will need to know theirs. Knowing each other’s Deepest Desire will support you in finding a real purpose in being together, something more than just cohabitating. Go back to Stage Three and reinforce each other’s Deepest Desire.

Rafael’s Deepest Desire is to be approved, he longs for approval. His Unique Contribution then is to make certain those around him feel approved. His acknowledgment is very important to those around him, anyone loved by him can attest to this.

Mine is Peace. Feeling peaceful, to have a peaceful surrounding. When I lose sight of this my life gets very chaotic and there is a lack of coherence. My Unique Contribution is causing and creating peace around me, for others.

As a couple, our Unique Contribution is Approval (acceptance) and Peace. Rafael is the owner of my company, The Stages of Love and I am the one who insures our work, writes our articles and trains our coaches.

As you read on the very first page, what we do and why we do it. This fulfills our Deepest Desires and keeps it on the front lines. It fuels our projects and ideas, and those are what make Stage Five come to life.

We both agree that life is very short and we want to leave a legacy.

## **Stage 6: The Itch**

### **Every Seven Years?**

Knowing who you really are and having a purpose will make this stage a blip on the screen or even completely invisible. Developing and working on projects keep the union strong. Regardless of how good a couple you are though, and how much work you've done, this stage is inevitable. But it doesn't have to be horrible or scary, it's just a stage and you will move through it.

There's no consensus among experts as to why "the Itch" may occur. Perhaps it's a matter of timing. Some theories suggest that our bodies and minds develop and change every seven years. With those kinds of changes happening in the mind and the physical body, the emotional body is certain to be impacted.

It is often called the "Seven-Year Itch". Except that it's not really an itch. It's you dreaming of better things. If you have allowed your life to get increasingly dull and uneventful, you might feel bored. Meanwhile your partner is having their own thoughts. Without a purpose for the couple, you can lose sight of yours and your partner's Deepest Desire. After all it is your Deepest Desires that lead to your purpose and often needs to be rejuvenated.

### **For Better or Worse**

You may find yourself wondering if the grass is greener on the other side. It might even be thoughts that include, instead of a new lover, no lover at all. Whatever the distraction, keeping in mind that it's only a stage and that you can move through it will ease any internal tension.

Some couples explain this stage in this way.

Couples who stay together and/or married for seven years are likely to be together for good, experts say. A study found that by the time a couple has been together that long, their union is increasingly likely to last. After ten years, their chance of separating has diminished to half what it was when they first committed. And to add to that optimism, couples who have something bigger than themselves to focus on have more reason to work through any distraction.

Love is an irrational force that makes people want to be together no matter what the circumstances are. In fact relationships with an irrational love are more successful than those motivated by material self-interest or exchange and cooperation. Therefore practicing romantic love and keeping playfulness alive is key, not only to stay together but to encourage more happiness with less effort. After all, if you have made it to stage six then clearly love has been a driving force.

The three key ingredients in any lasting relationship are truthfulness, forgiveness, and commitment. The couple hangs on through the tough times and reaps the rewards. The possibility of Stage 7, the Awakening stage, becomes available and offers the couple more than they ever dreamed.

## **Stage 7: The Awakening Stage**

### **The End of a Cycle**

Awakening for a couple can be described as the realization that there is a higher dimension of reality. Such a realization is inevitably accompanied by a heightened positive emotional state: feelings of joy, appreciation, and an outpouring of love and frequently intense ecstasy.

After having traveled through many of life's tribulations, the couple arrives at this place: a space that equals accomplishment while offering a future where the common conflicts between two people have disappeared.

The first cycle (the relationship is cyclical, therefore the seven stages will start again, though differently, the same qualities) enter this stage around year ten. This couple stands out, the partnership is unique and extraordinary.

Couples rediscover each other. They fall in love all over again, this time with a different aspect of their partner. This stage reignites the hormones Oxytocin, Dopamine, and vasopressin in a new way.

The lessons are in the journey, the flat refusal to ever give up on each other, or on the couple. Love is expressed and experienced in simple, small gestures each day. Grateful to be in this part of their journey and it gets better with the passing of time, if you have cultivated and communicated, it grows to be stronger than steel and becomes a safe haven.

My motto for marriage is: "We are not perfect, just perfect for each other."

Always assume that his/her intention is for your best interest, even if the intent somehow gets lost in the translation of his/her actions. Nine times out of ten, there is a misunderstanding that simply needs to be clarified.

### **Key characteristics of the AWAKENING stage:**

- Both partners' attention is focused on the present moment.
- There is a heightened sense of reality.
- There is an enhanced visual appreciation (of surroundings, art, nature, etc.).
- There is an added enjoyment of the common in everyday life.
- There is enhanced empathy.
- The couple has developed a nonjudgmental attitude.
- There is an increase in creativity and joy.
- There is an awareness of a benevolent presence.
- The couple has developed powerful methods for dealing with conflict.
- One's dreams are more coherent.

- The individuals are more authentic, accessible, with a better sense of humor, more tolerant, more perceptive, and wise.
- They have an agreed upon perception that every moment is new.
- They are modest and content with what is ordinary while a viewpoint of what they deem extraordinary.
- They have the ability to adapt and experience any viewpoint from the viewer's perspective.

A spiritual awakening is a sudden expansion or shift in consciousness. Stage Seven is that kind of awakening for the couple. A transition to Stage One, for the next cycle. In each cycle the stages are shorter. Stage One and Two might only last a few weeks or months. Stage Three will present a new opportunity to choose or the couple might get stuck. Getting stuck in Stage Three presents itself in every cycle of the Stages. Moving through it doesn't change, use this manual and The Stages of Love website to support you.

