

Divorce Vows



Divorce Vows



A New Approach

Eddie Sangiorgio

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Foreword



Divorce has become epidemic in our culture. It has touched all of our lives, either directly or indirectly and for many it is stressful on a multitude of levels—financially, emotionally and spiritually. I wrote this book to provide spiritual support and inspiration for those dealing with a struggling marriage or a pending divorce and also to be of assistance during the recovery period post divorce.

Now, more than at any other time in history we need a paradigm shift in the way we view our relationships. We need to come to a deeper understanding as to the real purpose of what our relationships are all about, and when they come to an end we need to learn how to conclude them with peace and closure. *Divorce Vows* helps you do this by showing you how to use a more spiritual perspective at this very difficult junction in your life.

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In times of military conflict, the military uses “rules of engagement.” *Divorce Vows* now offers those in marital conflict spiritual “rules of disengagement.” The book addresses the need for basic ground rules that are not only spiritually based but grounded in both common sense and practicality. It encourages people to focus on their own behaviors and adhere to higher priorities that transcend the physical aspects of their relationships.

When the *Divorce Vows* are used as a guideline, contentiousness at the end of a relationship can be minimized. The result is a divorce process that is less costly both financially and emotionally, resulting in a shorter recovery time post divorce. A couple may even discover that by applying a new set of vows, they can discover new ways to work together and save their marriage. Whether a couple divorces more amicably or stays married, the ideas in *Divorce Vows* will assist them to produce a more loving and supportive environment for themselves and their children and/or help them create healthier, more satisfying new relationships in the future.

If you asked an amicably divorced couple how they transformed their failed marriage into a civil, workable relationship, they would probably describe the concepts you will read about in *Divorce Vows*. If you asked an individual how they found closure and peace after divorcing a dysfunctional partner or ending an unhealthy marriage, they would probably depict their path as similar to that described here. And if you asked a couple who have had a long and successful marriage how they did it, they too would describe certain aspects of the spiritual concepts found in *Divorce Vows*.

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If you talked to any of these people, you would discover that they intuitively knew what they needed to do to find purpose and peace in their relationships, whether they took the path of marriage or divorce. This book is a guide for those wanting to follow in footsteps of such people by showing you how to tap into your spiritual side as you face the challenges before you.

If you are saying no to your marital relationship and yes to divorce, then you must think and feel that a divorce is going to work better for you and your family. Maybe you think it will solve specific problems. Maybe you need to extricate yourself from a dysfunctional partner. Or maybe you feel you could have a better relationship with someone else.

At this point, you might want to ask yourself if you have a plan to make a divorce work in your best interests and in your family's best interests. Is divorce truly the answer to solving your relationship discord or is it just an escape route with no clear destination? Do you know what it takes to create a workable and sustainable relationship with your (ex)spouse or a healthier relationship with a new partner. This book will help you answer some of these questions.

If you have decided that divorce is best for your relationship, you need not become a victim and perpetuate feelings of failure by having a nasty breakup, a financially draining divorce, or ongoing post-divorce battles. With a more spiritual perspective and the right assistance, a failing marriage can become a successful divorce. A painful relationship can be a catalyst to a healthier one with someone new in the future.

One of the main premises of *Divorce Vows* is that we are attracted to particular people and develop certain relationships

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for a reason. Relationships bring us our greatest joys and our greatest sorrows and thus they are our greatest teachers. There is an old saying that when the student is ready, the teacher appears. Are you ready to learn from your relationship and get beyond the pain? If you are not there yet, that's okay. There is a season for everything. Life does not care when you learn your lessons, only that you eventually do.

Many find it easier to face the lessons learned at the end of a relationship with the help of counseling. It is not the intent of this book to be a substitute for professional help. The book does not take sides, nor does it focus on blame and guilt. It neither promotes divorce nor advocates that couples stay married.

Divorce is a very personal decision. Sometimes divorce, like some marriages, is an emotional, knee-jerk reaction in the present moment, done in haste. Sometimes divorce is a mutual, well-thought out decision that is a blessing for all concerned. Sometimes it is a unilateral decision forced upon a partner, ending a very painful period for one partner and beginning pain for the other. Some couples should separate for safety reasons and there are others who could, if they were willing, work harder and possibly save their marriages.

Divorce Vows is applicable to all circumstances because its focus is on each partner's individual participation. Therefore you can read and benefit from it whether or not your partner also reads the book. It is more about you—your perspective, your feelings, your thoughts and your actions. This is ultimately about your soul's work. Leave your partner's soul work up to them. This book supports the loving, kind, decent person you

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are and is here to inspire you how to be that person more often, even during the unsettling times of separation and divorce.

The *Vows* are fairly objective on the surface, and yet they provide some latitude so every person can apply them uniquely to their relationship. They are fundamental components of a good, supportive relationship, whether a couple is divorced or married. Like vitamins, they are both preventive and restorative in nature. Each *Vow* is made up of two statements. The first statement is proactive, declaring what you are willing to do. The second part is more passive in nature but still is a declaration of your intentions.

The *Vows* are agreements you make to *yourself*, not necessarily to your (ex)spouse. The great thing about them is that there are aspects of each of them that you could apply to all your relationships in your life, not just toward your (ex)spouse, but to any important relationship you have now or in the future. When you work on one relationship you inadvertently work on the others, because you are ultimately always working on yourself.

It's okay if you resist some of the ideas in the book and have doubts as to whether they will help. Change and growth are scary because they require venturing into the unknown. Growth often comes from having an idealistic vision and taking a leap of faith.

There is a natural flow and progression to the book; however you need not read the book straight through with an all or nothing mindset. Think of it as a buffet. Start at the beginning if you wish or go straight to the topics that are a priority to you now. Leave the rest. Come back when you are ready and

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hungry for more. Maybe you will see the relevance of one of the *Vows* or a particular idea at a later time or in another relationship. We have many relationships in our lives with “till death do us part” potential.

Throughout each chapter you will find questions. Stop and ponder these or write them down in a notebook for later reflection. There are also fun and thought provoking exercises at the end of each chapter to help illustrate the ideas discussed in the chapter. Some of the exercises are mental exercises you need not record. Others are written exercises to do in a notebook. Some are physical activities to get you out of your head. All of them are designed to give you a different perspective about the ideas and help you step outside your conventional thinking so you can see your problems from a different angle.

If you truly want to come to some resolution about your relationship, you need to foster fearlessness within. Be willing to ask questions and look beyond the surface of your relationship. There is value to be gained from all that you have endured, but you must have the courage to find it. Just know that you are capable of far more than you know.

So just for awhile, acknowledge the untapped power you hold inside. Put aside your pain and your drama. Let go of the hurt, the blame, the guilt and the resentment that you might be holding on to. Calm your mind down as best as you can. Be quiet and lay down your verbal weapons just long enough to let some new ideas come in.

Divorce Vows will be worth your investment if all you come away with after reading it is just one idea that prevents you from

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saying hurtful words you can never retract; doing something so harmful that your loved one can never forgive you; or spending money on an unnecessary phone call to your attorney. Gains we make on the soul level are priceless.

Aren't you worth it?

Aren't your kids and loved ones worth it?

Isn't your peace of mind worth it?

Doesn't your future partner deserve your wholeness?

Healthy lives and healthy relationships do not exist in a vacuum. They are created out of purpose and intention and with loving, spiritual perspectives. More than you realize, it is how you hold something, how you view it and what you expect from it that makes it what it is.

Relationships are bridges that connect us not only to each other, but to ourselves. When we feel we have lost who we are and feel separated from love, our relationships are the way back. Allow your separation and divorce to be a time when your spirit becomes your guide and gently leads you back to love. Think of this time in your life as the perfect time for reflection, personal growth, and the possibility for positive change in your life. You will be amazed by how different your experience is when you look at this period of your life as an opportunity and not just a time of great loss.

How would you describe the perfect end of your relationship? Are you facing in the direction of that goal?

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*If you are facing in the right direction
All you need to do is keep on walking.*

—Buddhist Proverb

Allow yourself to face in the direction of love . . . and keep walking.

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*God bless each and every one of you
for your special support.*

Before We Begin



Divorce:
Choosing to let go of anyone or anything
that is not serving the highest good.

—A spiritual definition

Before We Begin

Adopting a more spiritual definition or a new approach might be a stretch for some who are dealing with the pain of separation and divorce because the end of a marriage is usually thought of as a physical and legal process and not a spiritually oriented experience. So before we begin, let's first discuss what is really meant by a new approach or a new way of thinking as it relates to relationships.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." He understood that a shift in thinking was necessary to move from the state where the problem is created to the place where the solution is found. In other words what we need is a new approach.

The high rate of divorce and the combative nature of many relationships are definitely significant problems we have created in society. Not only do we individually engage in contentious divorces but our society often promotes them by our overall attitude. Each of us has endured the emotional collateral damage of divorce, either firsthand or because someone close to us got divorced. Most of us have seen what happens when the same level of thinking that led to the separation was used during the divorce process. While trying to solve some problems, this level of thinking often only creates new ones in their place. So what does it really mean to go to a different level of thinking when it comes to relationships?

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Here is a story I heard more than thirty years ago in a college communications class. It illustrates what a new level of thinking and a new approach might look like.



One Friday night a group of friends was at a local bar shooting the breeze and letting off some steam after a long workweek. Mary began her usual monotonous bitching about her job as a telemarketing operator. Bill, a co-worker from another department, finally had enough of her whining and suggested that she just quit and get another job.

Mary said, "That's easy for you to say. You've got a college degree."

Flippantly, Bill replied, "So? You're attractive enough. You could always become a high-class prostitute or something."

Everyone laughed. Everyone except Mary. She was completely taken aback that Bill would say such a thing. She normally wasn't thin-skinned, but she knew a backhanded compliment when she heard one. She was tired and had had a bad day, so it didn't take much for her to take it as an insult. What made matters worse was the way in which the group continued on with callous comments about which corner she should work and how great she would look in fishnet stockings. She began to tear up, not just from hurt but from the frustration that her friends did not seem to understand how unfulfilled she felt in her job.

Another friend, Tom, didn't want to see a rift develop between his two colleagues, so he told Mary

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that Bill was only kidding. He suggested that even though Bill's remark had been insensitive and insulting, she might be able to use his comment to her advantage. Mary was aghast, but Tom was determined. He pressed on.

"Not everything is what it appears to be," he said, and explained that in order to use Bill's insult to her advantage, she just needed to change her perspective. "Why don't you look at his statement from a positive angle by coming up with three things that you would like about being a prostitute."

This remark only made Mary more livid. However, the rest of the group had quieted down and was curious about how this might work. So their laughs and less than kind comments turned into genuine support and they all began to prod her until she reluctantly agreed to play along with Tom.

After a good deal of thinking she said, "Well, prostitutes do meet a lot of people. I can't stand sitting in a cubicle all day."

Tom was thrilled with her response. "That's right. So you want a job where you meet a lot of people face-to-face."

Mary nodded in agreement.

Tom added encouragingly, "Okay, just two more."

Mary thought for a while and then responded, "Okay, they get to dress up, look pretty and wear the latest fashions. I'd love to have a reason to go shopping for really nice clothes and makeup."

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“So you want a job where it is important to look fashionable and attractive?”

Mary nodded again, only this time with a little more enthusiasm.

“Just one more. I’m sure you can think of something.”

Mary thought and thought. Finally she answered, “Well they do get to set their own hours and rates. I hate having to punch a time clock for an hourly wage.”

“Fabulous,” Tom applauded. “Now, as I hear it, you want a job where you meet a lot of people, can dress up and look fashionable and are able to set your own hours and wage.”

“That sounds about right,” Mary agreed.

Kate, another friend who had been listening and watching from the sidelines, blurted out, “That sounds like a sales job to me. Why don’t you sell cosmetics, or clothes, or be a personal shopper for people? Maybe you could go into the fashion industry. You’d be perfect.”

Mary’s eyes lit up, and she gasped. Instantly she thought of someone she knew who she could talk to about getting into the cosmetics industry. Within one year, Mary had started her own part-time business in the cosmetics and fashion industry. She eventually quit her full-time job and went on to become very successful as a personal shopper. Her success was all due to the fact that she was willing to look at the world through the eyes of being a prostitute, a position she would never have envisioned herself in.



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The point of the story is that we sometimes need to acknowledge that there might be a better angle we could use to approach a problem or look at a situation, even if that angle is very foreign from what we are used to. Once we are willing to do that, we can then see things from a different perspective and from this alternate frame of mind, we can come up with new ideas and new solutions. No one can do this for us. A new perspective has to start from within.

Like Tom, *Divorce Vows* introduces a new level of thinking by using a new approach to how you view your relationships and the problems and frustrations they pose. As you read some of the ideas and concepts, try and adopt Mary's attitude. It is perfectly okay if you are reluctant or even a little miffed at first. Even if it challenges you, play along anyway. It may push against your thinking and current way of seeing things. Just know that we often learn the most when we are out of our comfort zones.

A Whole New Way of Thinking

For openers, let's follow Einstein's suggestion and go to a new level of thinking about marriage and divorce by expanding their contexts. Usually we view marriage from a legal standpoint. We think that a marriage starts right after "I do" (verbal contract) with the issuance of a marriage license, and we typically think that it ends with the granting of a divorce decree (written contract).

Many refer to marriage as an institution. What if we referred to divorce as an institution too? Would that open up your thinking some? Here's another thing to think about. Have you ever considered that the contracts representing the social institutions

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of marriage and divorce might go far beyond the verbal and written contracts or calendar dates? We often underestimate the power of the implied or unspoken contract that all couples have between one another. What if our intimate relationships that resulted in marriage and divorce had far broader parameters than the dates that their legal statuses imply? Could there be such a thing as a “spiritual contract” and, if so, what part does it play in the relationship? How would you adjust your approach to your relationship if you did not confine it just to those two legal dates marked on a calendar?

Think of it this way. Some unmarried couples think, feel and act with commitment, as if they were married. While others not legally divorced think, feel and act separately, as if they were already divorced. Both are situations in which the couples are abiding by an implied contract. The *spirit* of their feelings rules the relationship. It does not matter whether they are legally married or legally divorced. They feel as they feel and they act within the relationships based on those feelings. Such couples do not need physical dates or legal documents to experience some of the same feelings as legally married or divorced couples.

Relationships do have beginnings and endings in the physical world, and the legal status of a relationship is important for legal implications. But it is important to understand that relationships also extend far beyond the confines of the time and space continuum. For instance, have you ever thought about what it would be like to be in a special, intimate relationship with someone long before you met that person? Or did you think about being a parent and having a relationship with your

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child long before your child was born? Have you been affected by a relationship long after it ended or been influenced by a person long after that person died?

The point is that relationships, like people, have an energy force all of their own. They have a spiritual quality to them because they connect us on the soul level. You may be physically able to mark a calendar with specific dates of marriage and divorce or birth and death, but those dates are only on the physical plane. The life force of the human soul and the energy of a relationship between two souls have no boundaries.

When you examine your intimate relationships through a wider lens you see they encompass a far broader and deeper context than you might have thought. Where do they really begin? Where do they really end? These are the questions that can inspire you to take a new approach with your relationship and can give you a whole new way of thinking.

If your heart is willing to expand even further, let's continue.

Vow One



*I will remember that there was a time
when we were friends.*

I will not turn you into the enemy.

Life is lived forward but understood backwards.

—by Sorën Kierkegaard

Vow One: Friendship

Most intimate relationships start out with certain feelings, expectations, or patterns of behavior that become the foundation of the relationship. Whether two people start out simply as being friends or they begin with romantic intimacy, each partner's feelings and expectations about relationships influence how they treat others and how they like to be treated. Those feelings and expectations impact the relationship from the very start.

Think about how your relationship started out and what it was like in the beginning.

- ✧ Where did you meet?
- ✧ What were the circumstances and what was going on in your life at that time?
- ✧ How did you treat one another early on?
- ✧ What did you enjoy doing together?

Whatever your relationship was like, it changed and developed to a place where you felt you wanted to go to the next level. You wanted more commitment. People say “I do” under all kinds of circumstances, for all kinds of reasons and with all kinds of feelings. When you made this commitment, did you make it to your best friend, who then became your mate, or did you make it to a mate you were hoping would become your best friend?

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Everyone assumes that marriage is based on some version of love and most are, but many marriages include a fair amount of fear as well: fear of being alone; fear of not being able to support a family; and/or fear of rejection. It is normal and even expected for couples who get married to feel some trepidation and fear along with the love and the passion behind the words “I do.” With the wisdom of hindsight, what do you think some of your fears were, behind the words in your original vows?

Another area to consider is your expectations going into the marriage. Here are some questions to consider as you reflect back:

- ✧ Who were your significant marital role models in your life?
- ✧ What kind of marriage did your parents have?
- ✧ Was there a married couple in your life whose marriage you wanted to emulate?
- ✧ Do you have many family members who have long-lasting marriages or do you come from a family with a long line of divorces?

Early impressions of marriage greatly influence your expectations. Reflect on what might have been your expectations going into marriage.

When Feelings Change

No matter what the beginning core of your relationship was or what your early expectations were, the feelings that led to your exchanging marriage vows have changed, especially if you are

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now considering divorce or have already gotten divorced. Maybe they got lost in the minutia of the day-to-day chores or amongst the job deadlines and stacks of bills. Maybe they got thrown out with the diapers or left on the soccer field. They could have gotten mixed in with the dirty laundry or forgotten amidst all the social obligations and birthday parties.

Perhaps they did not really get lost, thrown out, or forgotten but were taken from you because something happened that caused your feelings to change. Often an affair, an act of deceit, or some kind of abuse can totally change the feelings between partners. Whether you know exactly what happened to cause your feelings to change or the changes were subtle, slow to develop over months or even years, your relationship is different, possibly even estranged, in spite of the memorable picture albums you have on the closet shelf.

Along with these emotional changes, your intimacy undoubtedly has suffered and your communication might become strained or even confrontational. Maybe you have become so distant to one another that you just stopped communicating altogether. All you know now is that your relationship is definitely not the same and you are filled with a host of emotions. Whether you are separated, divorced or are just contemplating the idea of divorce, have you turned your partner into the enemy to justify your feelings or to justify your actions?

Anger and hurt are typical emotions during the process of separation and divorce. Feelings of rejection, loss and failure can become so overpowering that you find yourself in a state of shock, and the convergence of so many feelings and concerns may lead you to become overwhelmed. Those concerns are

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often not just about your relationship, but about the mortgage payment that is due, your stressful job, an expanding waistline, the leaky faucet, your aging parents, the school play next week or your child's dead goldfish floating bellyup in the bowl.

Maybe you feel trapped in an abusive—or at least a less than supportive—relationship and you desperately need out but you are scared of how your partner will react to you leaving. Maybe you are in a marriage that is not all that terrible and you are the one who wants to hold things together and work out your differences. Maybe you both are unhappy and neither one of you knows how to make the first move. There are a multitude of situations where divorce looms overhead, each with their own particular circumstances and each with their own experiences.

Some people going through divorce might experience periods of being apprehensive of an expensive and combative legal process and what the future might hold. Others might feel elated at their newfound freedom. Some might feel isolated because they think no one really understands what they are going through, while others reconnect with people as they reach out for support. Some will become depressed as the conflict, both within the relationship and within themselves, becomes all-consuming and still others will become more alive and happier at the prospect of being alone or having a better relationship with someone new.

No matter how you feel, uncertainty is almost inevitable. You might be wondering, is (or was) getting divorced the right thing to do? Will my children and family understand? Will I

ever love and trust someone again? Will I ever be in a healthy relationship?

Reclaiming the Possibility for Friendship

So where do you go from here? Is there any way you are *supposed* to feel about your (ex)spouse? Everything has become so complicated and confusing that it is hard to know what to do or how to feel.

Let's step back and look at your relationship from the core beginnings of your relationship and start there. *Vow One* states, "I will remember that there was a time when we were friends." At this point, you might be asking: Why should I do this? What if I discover we never really were friends, or at least not the kind of friends to build a marriage on? Isn't it too late for friendship now? I am in the process of breaking away from this relationship, or the marriage has long been over. Why should I go backwards when I want to go forward?

Sometimes you need to retrace your steps back to the beginning to get to your desired destination. It sounds counter-intuitive, but it actually is sound advice. Think of it this way. Have you ever traveled down a road and realized that you were lost? What was your first instinct? The wise thing to do is to turn around and retrace your steps until you come upon something that is familiar, maybe a landmark you recognize. From there it is easier to see where you made a wrong turn. From that point you can then start again, this time in a different, more accurate direction.

This is what is meant by remembering you were once friends. And if it so happens that you realize you never really were friends, then that too is a place to begin. Going backwards just means that you find that place in your relationship where you recognize the landmarks, and to get there, you must briefly go backwards.

A starting point has tremendous bearing on an end result. Someplace within your relationship, you once fulfilled each other and had the capacity to work together and get along. Is there anything positive from your past relationship that you could bring forward to help you create a different and maybe a better or at least workable relationship with your (ex)spouse now?

If you cannot recall a time when you were truly friends, bring whatever relationship you did have forward to the present and consider working on what might have been missing. For you it may not be about remembering a friendship, it might be about working at becoming friends for the first time.

The goal of *Vow One* is to encourage you to start seeing the relationship with your (ex)spouse from a different, more reflective, perspective, a perspective that is more spiritual in nature. Divorce is a time for change. It is also a time for reflection and new beginnings. Take *Vow One* slowly. Dredging up old feelings is difficult and often painful. But if you are able to acknowledge “what was,” it might make it easier to allow and work with “what is.”

Friend or Foe?

If your partner has become the enemy in your eyes or in your heart, is that who you want them to be to you? Pain, anger, and

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fear can greatly distort our perceptions. Are you getting divorced because you want to stop fighting and get over the pain or are you just changing venues where you will continue to fight and continue to hold on to the pain?

Where do you ultimately want your (ex)spouse to fit in your life? Friend or foe?

Jacob has been married several times. Finally, in his third marriage he has begun to understand the friendship component of all his marriages. Here is how he explains what he has learned.



I frequently walked away from conversations with my third wife feeling wounded and wondering why each time I had married such bossy, opinionated, judgmental, pushy women. Why did I keep attracting the same kind of partner?

You hear that boys marry girls to replace their moms and girls marry boys to replace their dads. I didn't think that applied to me at all. My three wives were the exact opposite of my mother. My mother was sweet, kind, passive and anything but judgmental.

If I look back on the "friendships" I had with my wives, I see that my wives just seemed more like sparring partners than friends. My mother never taught me how to spar with others. That wasn't her nature. I wasn't prepared for the kinds of relationships I had with

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my wives. The disagreements, the conflicts, and the heated conversations in my marriages too often got the best of me. I always ended up feeling that my wife was on top, the victor. I would eventually feel so beaten up and defeated that I would just quit.

I walked out and gave up on two marriages. Finally, now in my third go round, I have realized that my wife is not my enemy when we fight. She is trying to bring out the best in me with her pushiness, not trying to belittle me for my faults. She is trying to nudge me towards working on my weaknesses and make myself stronger.

I also finally realized that it's okay that my mom could not be that person who protected me or taught me how to stand up for myself. She taught me other things, like compassion and empathy.

I now see that my wife is not my enemy when we fight. She may be my sparring partner but she is also my friend. She doesn't stand over me defending me with her strength the way I wish my mom would have. Nor is she standing over me defeating me into submission. She is standing next to me, pushing, pulling and sometimes dragging me by my insides, encouraging me to stand up for myself.

As I bring all of my marriages forward into my present understanding, I realize that my wives were really my friends all along. I'm glad I finally found out in time to have the friendship I now enjoy with my current wife. I still have so much more to learn about

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myself and I probably have more to teach her about herself too. Because that's what friends do. We are here to grow and learn from one another.



If you feel baffled by this discussion, think of it this way. Haven't we all had friends in our lives that we don't always like? We do not approve of everything they do and do not always want to be in their company. They annoy and irritate us sometimes and they push our buttons. But we still consider them our friends and we still care about them.

A friendship-like relationship with your (ex)spouse need not be an all-or-nothing kind of proposition either. Maybe what would help is for you to expand your definition of the word "friend" to include your (ex)spouse. Understandably, this could be incredibly difficult for someone whose relationship has lost all trust and respect. There may be nothing you could even remotely describe as friendly between you right now. Maybe your (ex)spouse has been downright cruel to you. You obviously have a much more difficult challenge in this case, but do not give up on this idea just yet.

Jesus did not say that it was going to be easy to love your enemies. It is not easy to treat those who have hurt us with compassion and understanding. It does not come easy to send them loving thoughts. In fact, it is often extremely hard to do.

There is a great line in the movie, *A League of Their Own*, when Dottie Hinson, one of the female baseball players, says, "It just got too hard." Jimmy Dugan, her coach, replies, "It's

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supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everybody would be doing it. The hard is what makes it great.”

Often the hardest part of anything difficult is just mustering up the motivation to start. First, we need to be clear as to the benefit of our efforts. We also need to acknowledge the potential for our success. If we think in terms of failure, our chances for failing or not beginning at all are greater. What would the benefit be to you if you were able to embrace the idea behind *Vow One*? How would that perspective affect your relationship? How would a new way of thinking change your state of mind? What would it look like for you to have achieved a successful relationship with your (ex)spouse?

While you and your (ex)spouse may not necessarily become the kind of friends who get a bite to eat or go to the movies together, could there still be the potential for a friendship in the broadest sense of the word? Could you entertain the possibility of opening up and holding your (ex)spouse in your heart as a friend? Opening up to these new possibilities is not meant to set unrealistic expectations on either you or your (ex)spouse. It is about removing the limits from who you both could be and offering the space for growth.

In many divorce situations, both partners are too busy blaming the other to see any way out of their adversarial relationship, and these negative, hurtful feelings are then carried forward and affect not only their relationship but they infiltrate other relationships as well. Wouldn't we all be better served if we could learn how to part and go our separate ways with less animosity? With less emotional baggage? To do so may take spiritual courage on the part of one partner to take the initiative to

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believe in a friendly, or at least spiritually respectful, relationship. And by doing so the other partner might be more inclined to respond in kind. Aren't you and your children worth the effort? Don't your future relationships deserve the best from you now?

Raising the Bar on Ourselves

It is damaging to your own emotional and spiritual well-being to hold negativity towards someone, especially if there was intimacy involved. What we hold on to we eventually become. If you are carrying around negativity towards your partner, ask yourself this question: Do you eventually want to become that person with hurtful, spiteful, angry or sad feelings you presently are holding on to?

Establish safe boundaries and protect yourself when necessary and appropriate, but raise the bar on your own behavior and make a practice of treating your (ex)spouse as you would a friend. Try to separate your (ex)spouse, the person, from their behavior. You might be hurt or angry or frustrated by their words or their actions, but realize that there is a wounded soul inside them. As you learn to see and treat them differently keep open the possibility for positive change in their behavior.

This is not about being a Pollyanna and superficially optimistic. It is about being receptive to the idea of growth. If they do not act with decency or civility toward you, it will not be as a result of any lack of decency and civility on your part. It will be because they chose not to grow, and they chose to continue hurtful and negative words and behaviors.

**What we hold on to
we eventually become.**

And yet, are their words and behaviors who they *really* are? When you say or do things that are hurtful or deceitful to

someone else, is that who *you* really are? Do you want others to see only your persona and your irrational behavior, or would you rather they acknowledge that somewhere there is a deeper, decent, and loving part of you that is just not coming through at the moment?

Buried inside each of us is a human spirit that is covered up by our human façade, our ego. (There will be more about the ego in *Vow Two*.) Sometimes we cover up what is good and decent about us, and sometimes we cover up our hurt and our anger. Do not confuse your (ex)spouse's behavior with who he really is or with who she could become. What we see on the outside is only a fraction of what and whom a person really is.

So often when people lash out at others, what they are really trying to do is divert attention away from the negative feelings they have about themselves. In other words, we attack others instead of attacking ourselves. We project onto others how we feel about ourselves. Conflict in our relationships is often our own personal issues masquerading as external battles. Our partners are not really the enemy, even through a divorce. They take an adversarial stance to deal with their own internal fears. Because, in truth, relationships do not have issues. Individual people have issues and it is how these issues rub up against each other that cause conflict in relationships.

Changing the Box

Okay. Let's say you are still having trouble fitting your (ex)spouse into your definition of a friend and cannot imagine having a friendship with him or her. Their behavior actually makes you view them as your enemy. Adding to the difficulty, you are being asked to separate their behavior from whom they really are.

If you are still struggling with the idea of your (ex)spouse as a friend, then consider this: Neither the absence nor the death of one of you changes the fact that you two have become part of each other's lives. Whether you are friends or have respectful thoughts about each other or have just become neutral people in one another's lives, the relationship will be part of your heart forever. If you share children, then you really have a unique relationship. They will always be the other parent to your children. Always! In addition, they will also be the other grandparent to your grandchildren. And your relatedness continues on.

If you can agree that you have become part of each other's lives and you will continue to be, especially if you are parents, and you also agree, at least to some extent, that your limited thinking is preventing you from being open to a friendship or amicable relationship, then that is a start. Here is a little secret to applying Vow One:

***Your (ex)spouse is in a very special place
in your heart because you can think of him or her and
the relationship however you want to.***

It is totally your choice.

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You can *choose* to have limited thinking or you can choose to realize other possibilities.

So begin by realizing that your (ex)spouse is not just a physical being, but also a spiritual being. As you are. They may act sometimes like an enemy in the physical world, and you may have to deal with them as such. But from a different perspective, on a more spiritual level, what if you chose to believe that you came into each other's lives at exactly the right time and for a greater reason than what is just on the surface? Would your (ex)spouse not then become something akin to a spiritual friend? Would that help you change your definition of a friendship?

What an outrageous idea! It is not only thinking outside the box—it's changing the box. But if you do not choose whom your (ex)spouse is going to be to you and why you were together, then who will? Are you going to allow your (ex)spouse or someone else—like the attorneys or your family—dictate how you will hold the relationship or what purpose it serves in your life?

How much more peaceful would you feel if you were not always thinking of him or her as your enemy but instead, you thought of your partner as a spiritual friend who is a teacher who has come into your life for a reason?

How much faster would you heal if you weren't consumed with thoughts about what an awful person they were? How much less stressful would your life be if you weren't constantly contemplating your next verbal zinger or conjuring up your next legal maneuver. Instead of all this negativity how would it feel if you chose to be more spiritually minded and entertain thoughts of growth and purpose?

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Even if your (ex)spouse's behavior was or still is contemptible, even if he is behaving irresponsibly or even if she is spiteful, hateful or irrational, you do not need to feed into their behavior by thinking and behaving in kind. This is not about denying who they have become or denying how they are acting. It is about not letting their negativity distort who you really want to be. When you purposely choose your thoughts about your partner, you can continue to be aware of their destructive behavior and protect yourself when necessary, but you also acknowledge that they have come into your life to serve a greater purpose and you are determined to discover that purpose.

Too tough an assignment? Requires too much work? It's true, long held beliefs do not change overnight. Deep seated

feelings do not go away easily. But staying stuck in a mind with painful memories or trapped in an adversarial relationship is not pleasant either. If you want peace in your heart, allowing negativity to dictate your behavior is not the way to get there.

You might need to turn your thinking inside out and buck the traditional line of thinking that most divorces take. You might need a more spiritual perspective to be your guide.

If you have gotten to the point where you are willing to approach your relationship with a more spiritual perspective and your (ex)spouse has not, do not give up and think that applying *Vow One* won't help. You can remember the friendship, or act

Relationships do not have issues. Individual people have issues and it is how these issues rub up against each other that cause conflict in relationships.

like a friend from here on out, no matter whom he is or how she acts. Doing this is worth the payoff, not just for your present peace of mind and for your children's emotional well-being, but for the well-being of all your close and intimate relationships now and in the future.

Deleting the “Ex” From Ex

One of the things that might help you apply *Vow One* is to avoid thinking of your divorce as just a legal issue. Don't allow the bigger picture of your relationship to get colored with too much legal terminology. The legal system may need to refer to you as the plaintiff or the defendant, but you need not limit your view in this way. Keep that language for the courtroom and legal system only.

One way to do this is to look at the language we use, so let's rethink the way we refer to divorcing spouses. For instance, many people refer to their former spouse as “my Ex.” *Ex* comes from a Latin term meaning “former.” So why don't more people say my “former spouse” instead of my “ex-spouse”? Could it be that they use the term *ex-spouse* instead of *former spouse* as a subconscious way of implying they are trying to “X” their spouse out of their lives? Spiritually speaking, is that even possible? Couldn't we come up with a term that has no emotional or legal baggage attached to it, especially for those who are co-parenting children?

For those of you who are parents it is helpful to look at your relationship as a collaborative effort, especially if you both want to be involved in the raising of your children. In essence, you are in a collaborating role of parenting. From this specific role, we

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have the new name for you and your (ex)spouse. You are now *collaborators in parenting*. That is not a very easy name to roll off your tongue, so let's shorten it to *CIP*.

Wonderful! Sports have MVPs. CPAs do our taxes. VIPs get special treatment. Now you have a no-baggage name for

your children's other parent. They are your CIP and you are theirs. It represents exactly who you are to each other. It refers to your participation and responsibilities as well as to your position in a co-parenting relationship. It has no legal or emotional connotation.

If CIP does not completely appeal to you, that's okay. This term is strictly for the purpose of reinforcing the ideas in this book. Names can be a powerful way to subtly reinforce attitude and behavior, whether our own or another's. Why do you think that "used" cars are now referred to as "pre-owned" cars? It's still the same car, isn't it? Pre-owned evokes an attitude that is more appealing. To help reinforce the ideas in the book, CIP is the name that will be used instead of (ex)spouse. It is meant to gently help you shift your thinking about your relationship to a more spiritual perspective, with focus on who you are to each other.

What is really nice is that married people are each other's CIPs too. Married families and divorced families will always be different from a legal standpoint, but this helps remind us of their spiritual similarities. Parents should think of raising children as a collaborative effort, divorced or not, because all parents have

What if you chose to believe that you came into each other's lives at exactly the right time and for a greater reason than what is just on the surface?

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the same goals: raising, loving, nurturing and supporting their children through life. And for those couples who have no children, CIP can mean Co-Intimate Partner.

In the space of a few pages I have just outlined the possibility for you to come from a totally different perspective, one that is more constructive and spiritually oriented. Let's recap:

- ✧ You now have the new term CIP to refer to your partner. In addition, you have also become a CIP.
- ✧ At some level you remember you once had a workable relationship.
- ✧ You need not think of your CIP as the enemy.
- ✧ You also need not think of your CIP as a friend in the traditional sense of the word.
- ✧ Special, close people in our lives are our spiritual friends who come into our lives for a reason.
- ✧ It is okay for you to be civil and act kindly towards your CIP without sacrificing your boundaries.
- ✧ With the right perspective you have the potential for a new and better relationship.

***Every end implies another beginning. Wow!
What a start!***

Exercise 1: The Name-Calling Game

One exercise you can do that can help expand *Vow One* and show you its application is the Name-Calling Game. Over time, everyone seems to become an expert at doling out names and labels for relationship partners.

Make a list in your notebook of ten derogatory names you have ever called your CIP, either to his face or behind her back. This list could also include or refer to faults and/or negative qualities you attribute to your CIP. Examples might include names such as *jerk*, *spendthrift*, *selfish* or *nag*.

Next, think in the exact opposite terms. List at least ten of the most wonderful names you have ever called your CIP. These may be nicknames or affectionate ways in which you have addressed them, and may include some of their best qualities and attributes. Examples might be *sweetie*, *hard worker*, *patient* or *great cook*.

Now compare the two lists. If you had to describe your CIP to a stranger, which list would you use most? Would your CIP agree with your selections, both the good and the bad names? Which list was easier to make?

Next, make the same two lists, but this time make a list of names you have called yourself, either out loud or just silently, to yourself. These may be faults or negative

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qualities you think you possess. Now, make a list of wonderful, positive names you have heard others call you and positive qualities you know you have.

Now compare these two lists. Which of these two lists do you think is a more accurate description of who you are? Do others see more of you in one list than the other? Are there any names that are on both the list describing your CIP and the list describing yourself? How similar are you two or are you very different?

We all are a combination of attributes and qualities, both good and bad. As you struggle with this period of time in your relationship, do not forget the good qualities about your CIP. If you do, your CIP might forget yours.



Vow Two



*I will notice when my ego's desires and fears
are creating conflict.*

I will not discount your ego's desires or fears.

Egos.
Can't live with them.
Can't live without them.

Everyone has an ego. It is like a mask we each wear as we go through life. This is not a bad thing. It is part of being human. Everyone also searches for some form of fulfillment, however they describe it.

Many believe that they will find fulfillment by being in an intimate relationship. Most cannot live in isolation and be truly content and satisfied. We need interaction and relationships with other people. Our egos play a big role as we search for fulfillment through relationships and marriage. Egos can play just as large a role in our pursuit of fulfillment when we end a relationship or get a divorce.

Our humanity binds us together physically and spiritually, but it is the ego that makes us feel separate from everyone else. One of the main jobs of the ego is to help us survive, not just from a physical perspective, but emotionally too. To do this, it will go to great lengths to maintain the feeling of separation and independence. Yet when we are drawn to another human being by powerful and indescribable feelings of connectedness, our ego has to reconcile these emotional feelings with its own pursuit of survival.

The connection that draws us into an intimate relationship is a complex process. One of the ways our connection to another person manifests itself is through an experience called “love.” The ego is not the source of love, but it is often through

our ego that we express love. The ego learns how to manipulate the experience of love to fulfill its purpose, which is to survive.

To make any marriage or relationship work, it helps if you learn how to step outside your ego and look at how the ego has manifested love. To make a divorce work, it is wise to do this also.

Fear and Desire

Every person (every ego) has a unique combination of desires and fears, some existing from birth and others acquired through life experience. Desires include our individual wants, such as the desire for money, things and recognition, and our needs are such things as the need for food and shelter. These desires and needs are not bad; they are simply part of the human experience.

Fear is another part of the human experience. Some fears seem to be built into the human system, such as the various phobias that people have. Others are acquired. For instance, a fear of intimacy or abandonment could be acquired from a failed past relationship. Fears are about perception and about keeping us safe. Whether or not those perceptions are justified in the physical world, they are very real to the ego.

The ego's desires propel us forward toward our definition of happiness and the ego's fears function like an internal braking system to slow us down, protect us, and sometime even stop us. When our ego's desires and fears are combined in healthy proportions and work together in harmony, we experience life as having a checks-and-balance system that flows fairly smoothly.

The drama we manifest in life often happens when the ego experiences a juggling act between our desires and fears. For

example, we want to achieve something, but we may have a fear of success that holds us back. Thus, we experience drama and sometimes chaos.

This friction between your desires and your fears takes on an added dimension when you enter a relationship, because there is now more than the internal conflict of one person's ego. An external battle of the desires and fears of two interacting egos is now added, much like a spice, to the mix.

When two people join their lives, especially in marriage, the relationship becomes almost an entity unto itself, with its own ego. In an episode of the *Seinfeld* show titled, "The Relationship," Jerry Seinfeld jokingly said, "Relationships are like organisms that we create. We starve them and then wonder why they turn against us. Same thing happened in *The Blob*." Seinfeld's humorous observation was an exaggerated description of any relationship that two people create which seems to turn ugly and at some point turns against them.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the soulmate kind of love that couples can experience and a love that has been manipulated by the ego. Feelings of love can be felt in a multitude of ways, both spiritually and physically. Marriages sometimes end, not because the partners stopped loving each other, but because the balance between the two egos got out of whack. Their egos could not, or would not, coexist with the way the dramas were playing out.

Power, jealousy, passion, greed, anger, grief, resentment, righteousness and rejection are only a few of the feelings that can dominate the emotional scene of most intimate relationships, both within marriage and during a divorce. All of these

are ego-driven emotions. They have nothing to do with who we are as spiritual beings.

The spiritual side of us only experiences love and its derivatives such as compassion, joy and forgiveness. This part does not vanish just because a relationship experiences conflict. But the spiritual side does get ignored, downplayed and forgotten—sometimes consciously, but more often unconsciously—because of the ego’s unrelenting force and its need to survive by manipulating the physical world.

When a relationship goes through an excessive amount of drama (once again, the ego’s battle between desires and fears), it can break apart. The spiritual connection between the two partners can become overshadowed by each other’s threatened ego. Drama draws the egos out into the open, where they stake out their separateness. This in turn results in both partners justifying their actions or emotions so they can feel right.

Luckily, the spiritual side does not disappear completely during these highly dramatic periods. Otherwise, we would never experience the “calm after the storm” period of a fight. The spiritual side quietly waits on the sidelines for the momentum of the battling egos to eventually run its course.

Most likely, you have had an emotional, knock-down-drag-out fight with a loved one during which the intensity grew until the energy to fight just ran out. The love you had for one another did not completely disappear during the fight. It temporarily just got pushed aside.

The divorce process is often just a prolonged experience of sidelining each partner’s spiritual side. For many couples their spiritual side is never found, even years after the divorce.

The faster, however, you can bring the spiritual part of you back into dealing with the relationship, the faster you can resolve the conflict and discover its higher purpose for your life.

The Experience of Love

From an ego standpoint, love usually is experienced as a mushy feeling of connecting our separateness to someone or something. We become emotionally attached, and our ego comes to believe that we need this other person or thing to survive. When we experience love in an intimate relationship, we often describe love as a space that we “fall in” or “out of” as if it had a space-time dimension with measurable parameters. This expression reinforces the conventional wisdom that a couple must be “out of love” if they decide to divorce. This is purely the ego’s perspective.

Like the wind, we know love exists because we feel it and see its effects, but we do not exactly know where it comes from. When we do not feel it, we think it is no longer there. And because we are not exactly sure where it comes from, we do not know how to get it back. Therefore, we mistakenly think that we can be “out of love” just like we can be “out of gas.”

What actually happens is that we lose touch with the spiritual love we have for one another and allow our ego side to take control. When this happens, egos often choose to manifest love differently than they used to. It feels different when this occurs. Spiritual love and ego love do not have the same purpose. Ego love wants something in return and decides to withdraw when it does not get what it wants. Spiritual love

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is given unconditionally and needs nothing in return. You can never be “out of love” because its source is your infinite spirit.

Some would go so far as to say that before a couple divorces they need to hate each other, because if they loved one another, they would not get divorced. An interesting take on this concept was expressed by a minister who takes the opposite view. He once said in a sermon that a couple shouldn't get divorced because they hate each other. They should get divorced because they love each other.

What he meant by that statement was that when two people love each other enough to recognize the truth about their love, then it might be appropriate for them to divorce. Perhaps they realize that maintaining a marriage façade is actually doing more harm than good to the family or come to understand that the type of love they share is not what they want or need from a marriage. This is an example of the spiritual sides of each recognizing that the clashing of their egos is destructive and parting ways would be best for all.

In this case, the couple is being truthful about their love. Getting to this point in a relationship is far too rare. It is not very common for even one partner to be able to tell the truth about their love. Why? When it comes to matters of the heart most people are not encouraged to seek the truth. It is not because they *can't*. They just don't know *how* to do it.

We are so used to our egos running our lives, especially our relationships, that we often dismiss other possibilities. Is the minister correct? Can you actually love your spouse and still want a divorce? Can love be one of the reasons to get divorced?

Can you turn an ego-oriented, conflict-ridden love into a more spiritual love that heals and preserves your marriage?

Defining Love

How do *you* define love? Some say that it is the sum of all energy, the most powerful spiritual force in the universe, and that it is everywhere. To many this describes God. For others, it is more ego-related and physical in nature. For these people, sex is called “making love,” and this is the love that songwriters write about which gives us goose bumps or makes our heart pound. So is love a spiritual feeling or a physical feeling?

You can never be out of love because its source is your infinite spirit.

The answer: it is both. Love is an indescribable mix of emotions, some experienced emotionally and spiritually and others experienced through our body. The bottom line is that loving, intimate relationships are complex, and love can be generated in a multitude of ways. In order to recognize when the ego is dominating and creating conflict, it might be helpful to recognize when the ego has manifested love.

The ego feels and shows love in a number of different ways. The Greeks recognized this human phenomenon and had multiple words for love. All loving or caring relationships incorporate one or more of the following “love definitions” and the way each relationship manifests love makes each one unique.

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The most common Greek words describing love are:

Agape (ah-GAH-pay) means love in modern-day Greek. It emphasizes the care and self-sacrifice for another. Couples with agape nurture each other and hold one another in high regard.

Eros (AIR-ohs) is a romantic kind of love. Couples with eros have a strong intense emotional and sexual attraction for one another. You could describe a couple with eros as having great physical chemistry.

Philia (FEEL-ee-ah) is a dispassionate, virtuous kind of love. The Greeks used it to describe friendship. The focus on this love is mutual commitment, friendship over time, and common goals. Couples with philia are often best friends.

Storge (STOR-gay) means affection and it is the kind of love that family members have for one another. It is more practical in nature and stoic. Couples with storge have a very common sense approach to their love and have great respect for one another.

Marriage and intimate relationships can be a combination of one or more of these ways of showing love. Relationships that demonstrate love in a variety of ways are probably less likely to end up in divorce because they have more love legs to stand on. At the same time, when couples in such relationships do divorce, it can be more complicated and traumatic because there are more emotions for the ego to reconcile. Love is one of the most complex emotions a human can experience. It is no wonder we are perplexed when we ponder a question like, "How do you know when you are truly in love?"

Vow Two: Ego: Desires & Fears

M. Scott Peck wrestled with his own definition of love. In *The Road Less Traveled*, he connected love to the nurturing of spiritual growth—one's own or another's—in a deliberate, purposeful way. This is an excellent way to think about love as you try to apply *Vow Two* to your relationship or to your life in general. It would be virtually impossible, given the physical and ego-oriented nature of our humanness, to always act within a relationship from this highly spiritual perspective. But when you use Peck's concept of love as a model, then the relationship might be less affected by ego derived conflict.

Love, Ego, and Conflict

Why two people are drawn together by love, only to end up in painful conflict, is one of life's greatest mysteries. Like magnets, we are attracted to one another. Then, for a variety of reasons, we are pulled or pushed apart. The only way to begin to solve this mystery is to ask yourself some tough, soul-searching questions and go beyond your ego to hear your heart's answers.

Maybe the answer lies in what drew you together in the first place. Perhaps, as in *Vow One*, you need to go back to the beginning and ask questions like:

- ✧ Why did we get married in the first place?
- ✧ What did I feel when we got married?
- ✧ How is that different from what I'm feeling now?
- ✧ Was it really a spiritual love or was it more egotistical and physical in nature?

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You can never detach yourself from your ego, just as you can never detach yourself from your spiritual side. We are a packaged deal. When we love someone, it includes both parts of us, just not necessarily in equal proportions. When we feel we no longer love that person, it is helpful to evaluate both sides of ourselves too.

Difficulties arise because many people do not want to admit that they even have an ego. For some of them, that denial is caused by thinking that having an ego is the same as being egotistical and feeling superior to other people. This misunderstanding, mislabeling, and denial of the ego can feed the problems that cause interpersonal conflict to spin out of control. Acknowledging that you have an ego is the first step in recognizing the problems the ego can cause in your relationship. Acknowledging that you have a spiritual side is the first step in recognizing the power it can have in helping you solve some of those problems.

However, there is much more than just acknowledging that you have an ego side and a spiritual side in play. Distinguishing between the motives of the ego and the motives of the spirit can be tricky. The journey between the head and the heart is a long and arduous one. According to Gary Zukav, author of *The Seat of the Soul* and *The Heart of the Soul*, it was the longest journey he had ever taken. However, when you ask these soul-searching questions, you give your spiritual side hope that you will eventually find some closure for yourself through your answers.

Your spiritual side only desires peace, but no matter how much your spiritual side wants peace, your ego has desires and

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fears that must be addressed as part of the journey. The journey is made even more difficult when you know deep down that you want peace in your relationship but your partner seems to want to fight at every turn. How can you problem-solve or have rational discussions with someone who always seems to want to fight?

The best strategy is to keep asking yourself the soul-searching questions that shine the light on your own ego. Those questions force your ego to reveal itself and once revealed, your ego loses power and your spiritual side becomes stronger. One way to defuse the strong ego of another is to confront it with a strong spirit. Light always wins over darkness.

When you tap into your spiritual side during those times of conflict, you will be in a better place to know how best to deal with the situation. Maybe you will choose to stand your ground and fight. Maybe you will choose to give in and not engage in battle. Or maybe you will choose to fight, but you will know when to back off.

The questions we ask ourselves, both consciously and subconsciously, present us with our choices and the choices we make determine our paths. Our battles (our challenges) are invariably reflective of the opportunities presented to us, the questions we pose, and the choices we make. For instance, you were presented with an opportunity for a particular job or career and you chose “yes.” Or you asked yourself if you should marry this person and you chose “yes.”

Whether you like it or not, you are the one who ultimately gets to pick your battles because you make the choices. What challenges have you been picking so far? What do you think you have learned from your choices?

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If you were to examine your ego more closely, you might ask whether your ego really wants to put an end to the battle, or is the conflict still providing your ego a means of feeling its separateness? What benefit do you get out of fighting about a certain topic? On the other hand, do you fight about these things as a means for the two of you to feel connected? For instance, there are couples who feel the most connected when they have *make up sex* which can only happen after a good fight.

If you are in a relationship with someone who seems to relish conflict and drama, maybe it is because they intuitively know that one or both of you need an external conflict in order to settle an internal one.

What does that mean? As was mentioned before, outward conflict is often just inward conflict that has been externalized. When we are angry with another person for something they have done, that anger is often linked to the anger and judgment we feel within ourselves for having done similar things we dislike. Or it could force us to face old emotions from a past relationship that were never resolved. Conflict in relationships can serve a greater purpose if we let it. It can be a great teacher if we are willing to see it that way.

The point is to see if there is a correlation between the external fights you have with your CIP and the internal struggles you have within yourself. See if you can figure out where they are coming from. What is the source of an internal battle that keeps triggering your response to a conflict? We'll talk about this idea again in another chapter. For now, just know

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this is a tough assignment and is an ongoing, lifelong process in all our relationships. Be patient with yourself as you reveal your ego and go searching for your answers.

One way to find some answers is to reflect on what has transpired so far. For instance:

- ✧ Do you keep attracting the same kind of people?
- ✧ Are you a giver and your partners have all been takers?
- ✧ Are you a nurturer and your partners have been needy?
- ✧ Are you someone who likes to fix problems and your partners have all needed “fixing”?
- ✧ Why do you think you were drawn to particular people at a particular point in your life?

The common denominator in all your relationships is you. Is there a common theme that keeps coming up, especially in your intimate relationships?

Here’s another strategy to try. Look at what theme keeps coming up in your self talk. The incessant chatter that goes inside our heads often takes the form of simulated conversations with others as we argue our case.

- ✧ What does the chatter inside your head sound like?
- ✧ What are the topics?
- ✧ Who are you conversing with?
- ✧ What are you trying to convince them of?

Pay attention to these practice arguments or conversations and take notice of the voice in your head. The topics of these internal conversations can often reveal your deepest desires and fears. This is one way to get to know the workings of your own ego.

Conflict in relationships can serve a greater purpose if we let it.

The next time you are in a conflict with your CIP, try to figure out with some specificity what desire or fear the conflict is triggering. You may or may not be able to do it in the heat of the battle. But afterwards, reflect back on what was said and how it made you feel. What did your CIP say or do that prompted you to react the way you did? Did you react out of a need for control, security, or self-esteem? What fear or desire was your ego protecting or demanding during this argument? The goal is to help you recognize your ego so you will be in a better position to prevent it from affecting your relationship whether in your marriage or through divorce. Just because your CIP may not be ready to wrestle with his or her own ego does not mean that you cannot wrestle with yours.

The point is that you have to sometimes look at your conflicts from a different angle and try to describe them from there. What do you see? What might be there but not in the way you thought? For instance, maybe you think your CIP wants to fight all the time, when actually you are the one who steers a conversation into an argument. Maybe they are not the one looking for a fight. You are. Maybe what they are doing or saying is not really all that bad but whatever they do, it triggers a long held fear in you that you can't control.

Vow Two: Ego: Desires & Fears

This is all about having more self-awareness, which is the only path to having more peaceful relationships. If you understand yourself better, truly love and are at peace with yourself, you are much less likely to respond in a way that escalates conflict with other people.

Therefore, whether or not you are the instigator of conflict, one of the purposes of conflict in our relationships is to help us know, accept and love ourselves better through them. So, the choice is yours. Enter willingly into a conflict on behalf of your issues and see what you can learn, or engage in the fight but ignore the lessons presented to you and keep on expending your energy.

Two strong but acknowledged egos can have a wonderful relationship. At the same time, two spiritually minded people can get divorced. Relationships work the best when they are based on the truth, whatever that truth is. The ego has a difficult time with the concept of the truth unless it can manipulate the truth for its own survival or righteousness. We have gotten so caught up in our egos and the roles we have created that we have forgotten one very profound truth.

We have egos but we are not our egos.

Once you acknowledge that even though you have an ego you are not your ego, it becomes easier to ask the soul-searching questions. Your answers to these tough questions might enlighten you as to what is getting in the way of having what you really want in life or in your relationship. If you practice strategies of self-awareness long enough, you will learn how

to distinguish between the motives of your ego and the motives of your spiritual side with better accuracy.

Facing Our Fears

Distinguishing this is not an easy task by any means. Most people are so busy playing hide-and-seek behind the mask of their ego that they are not even aware of the entity that is doing the hiding. They fail to become the seeker in the game. The main reason we hide behind our masks is that we are afraid of revealing our fears. We think hiding our fears is a way to control them.

Divorce provides a huge arena for facing our fears, such as fear of an unknown future, fear of financial loss, fear of losing material things, fear of losing parental rights and fear of being alone. This is why divorce is so difficult on so many levels.

What are your biggest fears about separation and divorce?

- ✧ Are you afraid of the physical process itself or just the legal process?
- ✧ Are you afraid of being single again and having to face rejection?
- ✧ Are you afraid of what your kids might think or feel and how it will affect them?
- ✧ Are you afraid that you will never believe or trust another person again?
- ✧ Are you afraid of how divorce will affect you financially?

Vow Two: Ego: Desires & Fears

Can you see that your list of fears points you directly to your ego's motives? Just as lies need more lies for support, the ego needs more fears to justify its actions. Each fear is built upon another fear. If you work backwards through your fears far enough, what will you find? It has been said that there are only two main emotions: love and fear. And every other emotion is a derivative of one of the two. If you can get to the bottom line of your fears, will that help you get to the truth of what love is for you?

Your fears and desires may not be the same as those of your CIP. The rationality or irrationality of either desires or fears does not diminish their impact on either of you. If someone is deathly afraid of water, it does not help to pooh-pooh their fear and throw the person overboard yelling, "Just swim!" Whether or not you agree with your CIP's interpretation of their experience is not the point. Accepting that their fear is real to them, as so are yours, and trying to understand the motives of both of your egos will get you a lot closer to settling your differences.

When you can recognize that your ego is dominating your life, you can better recognize when it happens to someone else. Don't let your ego get the best of you even though your CIP might let theirs get the best of them. With practice, you can learn how to avoid people who play the ego power struggle game. You will become a person who attracts people who want to play *with* you, not *against* you. These relationships are the most fun because there is minimal one-upmanship involved. There is less need to defend or deny your ego. These are the relationships that can last a lifetime.

Denial and Hidden Agendas

Of course, many relationships are replete with denial. Denial is a defense mechanism that allows a person to believe that something does not exist. Erroneously, they think that if it does not exist, then it cannot affect them. Some people are so far into denial that they are in *denial of being in denial*.

Denial can take many forms. Some deny the fact they even have an ego. Therefore, they are unable to acknowledge the part the ego plays in their lives. Others deny their spirit and are then unaware of the subtle spiritual guidance that they might be receiving. Denial of any kind does not lead to success in a relationship.

Success comes from your willingness to allow the relationship to lead you to your own blind spots and areas of denial. Your relationships then become mirrors to who you really are. When conflict can be seen as a means to reveal your ego and areas of denial then a relationship has achieved its ultimate purpose—helping you become a more enlightened person.

Many people get married with other purposes in mind and base the decision to marry on both a conscious and an unconscious list of pros and cons. A conscious list, coming through the ego, would be something like: He's handsome and educated. He'd make a fine provider for my children. Or, she's smart and independent and the sex is great! There are endless reasons the ego can use to make us believe that someone is Mr. or Ms. Right.

However, it is the unconscious list that is potentially the source of many conflicts. Hidden agendas are buried in this list.

Vow Two: Ego: Desires & Fears

Hidden agendas are not always bad. Sometime ulterior motives are actually good. They are only bad when they adversely affect a relationship.

Problems arise when you do not own up to what really motivates you. Unacknowledged hidden agendas can then stealthily influence your life without you even knowing it. Some of these lists include things like: He's vulnerable and weak. I can change him. She'll never leave me because she won't be able to live without me. I need a mate because I can't stand to be alone with myself.

With some thoughtful reflection can you recognize now an agenda that was hidden from yourself when you got married? If you believe you did not have any, you are probably in a form of denial. Every person who marries usually has a hidden agenda of one kind or another. Excavate what yours might have been.

- ✧ Did you want someone who would take care of you financially or sexually?
- ✧ Did you want to have children so you would always have someone who loved you?
- ✧ Did you want to get married so others would not feel sorry for you because you were still single?

Hidden agendas typically come straight from the ego. Recognizing the hidden agendas you had when you got married may shed some light on what your hidden agendas are now, as well as how they might be contributing to your relationship problems. Just as in the decision to marry, hidden agendas also play a part in divorce.

Divorce as a Solution

Divorce cannot solve an internal problem, and you cannot completely solve a problem until you can identify its source. Just as pain is the outward manifestation of an illness, conflict is a symptom of a problem, not the problem itself. Finding the source of the problem causing conflict is key to finding its solution.

Just as many people feel that marriage is a solution, but do not really know how to make it work, many also think of divorce as a solution, but do not know how to make it work either. Sometimes the space or the void that accompanies divorce makes you feel that divorce was indeed the answer.

What often happens is that the immediate pressure of dealing with the issues has been relieved. Divorce can be like taking an aspirin for a headache. The pain goes away but not the source of the pain.

Often issues are just put aside where they lie dormant, waiting to resurface later on in life. This is the very reason why a divorced person sometimes remarries someone with the same problems or issues as their previous spouse. The common theme resurfaced because they did not learn what the previous relationship had to teach them. Lessons we don't learn keep reappearing in new relationships.

Do not look at divorce as a solution to an internal personal issue. The best that a divorce can offer is the freedom and space to confront your issues and figure out some things about yourself so you can come to terms with them. Be aware that your ego's desires and fears are big stumbling blocks to this process.

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They will lie in the shadows, anxiously waiting for a chance to sabotage your effort unless you shine a light on them.

Since egos are really big on being right and winning at all costs, it obviously is not the best aspect of yourself to use when problem-solving with your CIP. Egos are too needy and fear-oriented. Having an exaggerated ego can make you greedy and ruthless through your desires. On the flip side, having a beaten-down ego can make you overly humble and weak through your fears. Both of these will limit your thinking and thus limit your solutions when you go through a divorce process. Have you been too aggressive, too weak or fairly balanced thus far in how you have dealt with your CIP and the divorce process? Having a balanced ego should be your goal.

Is it possible to stop coming from an ego-oriented place when dealing with divorce issues such as finances and possessions? Probably not, at least not 100 percent of the time. You will always bring some aspect of your ego with you. Remember, it is part of who you are. However, once a motive is revealed as ego-oriented, it begins to lose its power over the situation. You never lose your ego completely. The best you can do is recognize it and then manage it to minimize its interference.

The problem so often faced in divorce is that many let their egos do all the talking. If the egos are not kept in check, fear and greed can control the process and winning becomes the focus. The winner is deemed as the one with more tallies in the “win” column and divorce becomes a physical game as well as a psychological game full of hidden agendas.

Some of the hidden agendas of divorce are: getting not only what I want but preventing my CIP from getting what he

or she wants; having more people on my side to feel sorry for me; receiving more love from the kids than my CIP receives; or, being the first to enter into a new relationship.

Can you figure out what your hidden agendas are that might be dictating your decisions? For instance, are there particular items you want or conditions that you are adamant about? See if you can cut to the chase and figure out why.

Winning is not Everything

In divorce winning is *not* everything. If you consider it a game and you are not careful how you play the game, everything will be seen as a win/lose proposition. Most lawyers will assume they should go for all they can get unless their clients instruct them to play for an equitable outcome.

That is because lawyers typically are not trained in fairness. Their entire legal education is based on studying case law—who won, who lost and why. They also have their own egos that come into play. How can they feel they are the best if all they achieve in their legal practice is equanimity or fairness for their clients? Their egos want you to win. If you win, they win.

The divorce game you are playing with your CIP can then get sucked into the rules of lawyer games sometimes called “Winner Take All,” “Deal or No Deal,” “Wheel of Misfortune,” “What’s my Bottom Line?” or “Family Feud.” Does one of these game titles apply to your divorce? Not every lawyer plays these games, but be careful of who your ego wants as your legal advisor. (More about this in *Vow Seven*.)

What is important is that you realize that there can be multiple egos involved in the “game” of divorce, a variety of desires and fears and lots of hid-

**Lessons we don't learn
keep reappearing in
new relationships.**

den agendas. What kind of game does your ego want to play? What game do you think your CIP wants to play? What game are the lawyers playing? Is the game that you have chosen to play in your best interests, not just physically to appease your ego's desires and fears, but those of your spiritual side as well?

Do not rely just on your ego's perspective or the standard modes of operation established by the case histories of other divorces. You can use them as guidelines, but challenge yourself to appeal to your CIP's spiritual side to be a trailblazer. And if your CIP does not recognize his or her own spiritual side and does not want to share the ideas in this book, do not allow their reluctance to prevent you from appealing to their spiritual side now and then. The fact that you are exploring your spiritual side and they do not want to is probably a tell-tale sign of why you are (or have gotten) divorced. The space that a divorce creates between two people can either be filled with more ego or more spirit. All you can do is invite their spirit to come out. Ultimately, though, it is their choice whether they do so or not.

One way to entice their spiritual side to come out and participate is by asking questions or offering solutions that are clearly non-ego-oriented. There is no guarantee that they will go along or even like your suggestions. The important thing is that you demonstrate that you are willing to step out of your ego to come up with solutions that take in the bigger picture.

Life's changes can be very unpredictable, so it is impossible for a divorce decree to take into consideration every conceivable scenario. Every decree has an underlying spirit of intent. Make the spirit of intent in your decree more spiritual and less ego-oriented whenever possible.

The space that a divorce creates between two people can either be filled with more ego or more spirit.

If you are willing to notice your ego and even put it aside, you may be able to devise some really creative solutions to a problem. Only when you are willing to imagine and acknowledge something and de-

clare your intentions, can you take the once-thought-impossible and make it a possibility. Challenge yourself to imagine having a peaceful resolution to a problem. Acknowledge your creativeness in coming up with solutions. If you want a civil, post-divorced relationship with your CIP you first have to imagine and acknowledge that possibility and declare your intentions.

Let's recap:

- ✧ Issues or the areas of conflict in any relationship are directly related to your fears and desires which are aspects of your egos.
- ✧ Your spiritual side does not struggle with ego-related issues because its only goal is love and peace.
- ✧ Your desires and fears can lurk in the shadows of your behaviors and choices as hidden agendas. You need to reveal these hidden agendas to get to the heart of an issue.

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- ✧ Relationships do not have issues. People have issues, and it is how these issues rub up against each other that create conflict.
- ✧ Relationships either work or break down based on how a couple's personal issues interact.

Relationships only magnify the workings of the ego and its desires and fears. To deal with any issue you may be struggling with (security, abandonment, success, identity, independence or failure), you have to examine the relationship between your ego's desires and fears and how your ego uses these to survive and be right.

Uncovering egos is a challenge for all of us. Egos pop up frequently and will dictate much of our behavior if we let them. Divorce is often a time when egos are emboldened and become very good at manipulation and great at hiding, thus harder to find.

If your CIP has a very strong ego, you will undoubtedly have a more difficult time dealing with him or her. If you notice that conflict escalates easily, check your own ego. Your decision to divorce has already demonstrated that you two have decided on different paths. Your egos have clashed and bruised each other. Don't get discouraged. The game of hide-and-seek is no fun unless someone is eventually found. Deep down your ego really wants to be found, so keep looking. Believe it or not your CIP's ego wants to be found too.

As you play the game of life don't be afraid to yell, "Come out, come out, wherever you are!"

Exercise 2: Name Your Sport

Just for fun, let's step into the world of sports or activities to examine your ego. Think about your ego as if it were a sport or some physical activity that you enjoy either doing or watching. Everyone can relate to having fun playing or watching a game or participating in an activity. Here is a list of possibilities:

Baseball	Football	Tennis
Hockey	Skiing	Racquetball
Dancing/Yoga	Volleyball	Sewing/Knitting
Soccer	Basketball	Hunting/Fishing
Painting	Wrestling	Weightlifting
Running	Chess	Walking/Hiking
Card Playing	Skydiving	Race Car Driving

If you were to describe your ego as a sport or activity what would it be?

- ✧ Would your ego be a team sport such as basketball or soccer where you rely a lot on the play of others?
- ✧ Or would it be an individual activity based on self-reliance such as weightlifting or running?
- ✧ Would it be a high impact sport like hockey or wrestling?
- ✧ Or would it be a quiet, serene activity such as hiking or yoga?
- ✧ Is it fast paced and dangerous like race car driving or downhill skiing?

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- ✧ Or is it slow and cerebral like chess or card playing?
- ✧ Does it use physical things such as balls, or equipment?
- ✧ Does it use specific rules and guidelines?
- ✧ Or is it an activity with few or no rules like painting or dancing?
- ✧ Is it done in isolation or before a cheering crowd?
- ✧ Does it involve an offense versus a defense?
- ✧ Does a clock determine when the game or activity is over?
- ✧ Is there scoring with a winner and loser?

If you were to describe your CIP's ego as a sport or activity, what would it be? How different are your two egos when you look at them through this perspective? By describing your ego through the prism of being a sport or activity it can reveal a lot about you. It can help you determine what motivates you, inspires you, or pressures you to perform. It can reveal how competitive you are or how much you care about what others think. It can point you to your tendency to be rigid or free thinking.

It is fun and enlightening to look at ourselves from a different vantage point. We get to see a side of us that maybe we never saw before. What have you learned about your ego from reading this chapter and doing this exercise?



Divorce Vows

Notes

Vow Three



*I will accept that as we have changed as individuals,
our relationship has changed also.*

*I will not hold on to past perceptions
of who we were to each other.*

*The secret of change is to focus all
of your energy not on fighting the old,
but on building the new.*

—Socrates

Vow Three: Accepting Change

Your relationship has changed because you both have changed as individuals, and how you handle change is a key ingredient as to whether or not you will have a successful divorce and/or post-divorce relationship.

Just like marriage, a divorce is a life-changing event. For many, there is a long and difficult transition from the conflict at the end of a marriage leading to a separation and, finally, to the divorce decree. For some, the difficulties continue even beyond. Understanding how you relate to change and how you have viewed past changes in your life may help when dealing with this transitional period.

“The only constant is change,” is an old adage that is never more apparent than when applied to the life of an intimate relationship. Problems arise in relationships because people and circumstances are always changing and they do not always change in the ways we desire. For many there is an internal battle that stems from resisting the uncontrollable nature of change. We understand change intellectually, but we experience change emotionally.

The nature of change and its inevitability are the basis for much of the resistance we experience in life. Simply put, change drives some of us nuts. When people and circumstances do not change according to our wishes, our plans, or our directives, we (our egos) tend to hold onto how we want them to be, either

We understand change intellectually, but we experience change emotionally.

from our memories of the past or from our distortions of the present. The ego part of us is the part that must cope with change and the ego is all about survival.

Divorce is a huge survival issue in the lives of a couple and their family. Often the feeling of being out of control and not knowing how things are going to change is what causes so much of the angst and fear. At this point, it is helpful to consider how you have dealt with change in the past. Whether those experiences were processed positively or negatively might impact your perception of the divorce and your post-divorce relationship.

Obviously, you will experience and have to deal with physical, emotional, and psychological changes throughout your life. Yet, when these changes are reflected back to you in the mirror of your relationship, it is easy to forget that you are viewing a mirror of part of yourself. No one likes to look at a relationship that is approaching death or has died, just as no one likes to look in the mirror and see gray hair and wrinkles.

You are not the same people you were when you said your marriage vows; your relationship should not be expected to be either. As was discussed in *Vow Two*, relationships are like a living organism. They have a unique pulse, a rhythm and a flow of energy that is created by the energy of the two people involved. This makes the relationship you have with your CIP like no one else's. In some ways, relationships also follow the basic laws of energy—they cannot really be destroyed, they only

Vow Three: Accepting Change

change form. Like you, your relationship will change physically. It will feel different emotionally too.

Processing Change

A relationship works based on how the partners react to and how they process specific events and changes in their lives, both personally and as a couple. Are the partners responding and growing together to meet life's changes, or are these changes driving them apart?

In part, divorce is a result of how each partner reacts to change and how they bring that experience to the relationship. If neither you nor your CIP has experienced change since you took your marriage vows, your relationship would be unchanged and you would have no reason to get divorced. But without change, you and your relationship would be stagnant. You would not have grown, learned anything or experienced any other facet of "becoming."

Change is a characteristic of time in that it always marches forward. It is inclusive, encompassing the good and the bad, the joys and the sorrows. Divorce is merely a result of how one partner or both have experienced and interpreted change in the relationship or in themselves as individuals.

Like the death of a loved one, divorce is often a traumatic and painful experience, especially from the perspective of the ego. Recall that it is your ego side, not your spiritual side, which reacts negatively to all the changes. Spiritually speaking, divorce and death are neither positive nor negative events; they are just part of the time and energy continuum of life. Your ego bears

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the burden of dealing with all the pain and trauma surrounding death and divorce and then labels these feelings as sad or wrong. Your spirit views things much differently. From the spiritual perspective, the intimacy of a relationship, the commitment of marriage and the sorrow of divorce are experienced for the benefit of learning that is done on the level of the soul.

Because humans are so ego-driven and because there are a host of physical, legal and logistical changes to deal with, there is a tendency to overlook the spiritual changes and the benefits to the partners that both marriage and divorce offer. Through sickness you can understand health; through your mortality you can learn to appreciate life; and through the conflicts you experienced in your marriage and divorce you can learn about and better understand yourself. If you are willing to embrace the opportunity, the changes in your relationship offer you many lessons and can help you discover how it has ultimately helped shape your life.

Changes in our Psyche

The litigious divorce process that has evolved through the legal system has created a whole class of walking wounded. There are millions of people, both adults and children, struggling to cope with the changes that a divorce forced on them. Apart from the external, logistical changes, divorce also causes deep internal changes and unfortunately society and our culture have not supported divorcing couples very well in their struggle to reconcile all of the internal, spiritual changes that take place as well.

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On a physical level, divorce changes many things for divorcing partners and their families, such as their finances, where they live, what car they drive, where they work, their recreation and their time and accessibility with their children. On a deeper and more profound level, divorce affects the core beliefs about love, trust and relationships in general.

Children of divorce are affected too. They often are left with many lingering questions. Can they believe in love? Does integrity or the truth matter? Will they be able to have a happy marriage when they are older? Divorce causes long-lasting ripple effects when we do not address these fundamental changes in our psyche.

If you do not know the specific, intimate details of a friend's divorce, it would be normal for you to wonder what changed or what went wrong. Your friends may have seemed happy, at least happy enough. You may also find yourself wondering if your marriage is like theirs in any way. In the end, divorce touches all—family, friends, co-workers, neighbors—everyone. And because of the numerous questions that are often left unanswered we are all disturbed by the process.

Does a divorce have to be an all-or-nothing proposition, in that it's all bad or all good? Could you view this new direction in your life as an opportunity to grow and make positive changes for yourself while, at the same time, mourning the end of the marriage? For those not yet divorcing, can you see the tension and pain you bestow on each other as alarm bells that are telling you your marriage is sick and needs healing?

Many people experience any change in marital status as a kind of death, whether it is the death of "singlehood" upon

getting married or the death of a marriage upon divorce. Both transitions are an important adjustment exercise for the ego.

The essential thing to do is first, *acknowledge* that your relationship has changed and will continue to change, especially if you are co-parents. Second, you need to *accept* and get to the point of embracing those changes. And third, you need to *take responsibility* for your part. These are all keys in coping with either marriage or divorce and are also keys to growing from all that you have experienced. To truly get beyond the divorce decree, you must reconcile your ego with all the changes and allow a more spiritual perspective to emerge.

Change is Ongoing

Accepting and adjusting to change is a lifelong journey. Here are some things to think about as you apply *Vow Three* in your own relationship.

- ✧ What is your attitude about change in general and how do you usually handle it?
- ✧ Do you frequently look for change, or do you resist it?
- ✧ Are you a planner or someone who is spontaneous?
- ✧ How are you handling the changes in your physical appearance—with grace and acceptance or with stubborn resistance?

How you deal with physical change and aging on a personal level might give you some insight as to how you really feel about change. Plastic surgery for cosmetic purposes has grown

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exponentially over the last couple of decades. For some it may be a cry against moving forward to the next stage in life and accepting the physical changes brought on by time.

Some people seem to think that working on their external selves will change their internal experience. Sometimes this works, but more often than not, it fails. It is merely a diversionary tactic and just puts off the needed inside work for the time being.

Some couples may seek out cosmetic surgery for their relationships too, covering up their problems and diverting attention away from their issues with more things or activities. They buy nicer houses, spend money on expensive vacations, or just add more to their already cluttered lives. They join clubs or organizations or get involved in their church or charities. Some will focus on the kids or their work, which gives them the justifiable time away from working on their marriage. They become preoccupied with doing or acquiring or achieving whatever it is that drives and motivates them.

In other words, they concentrate on the stuff in life. They do this because they think that these external changes—like making more money, buying a new house or having a baby—will somehow make their relationship better, happier or more satisfying. These are all fine things to want to achieve but they are often just temporary detours from the real issues in a relationship. Money can only solve *some* problems. Children can only draw two people closer in *some* ways.

Divorce is sometimes a temporary fix, too. It can be like heart bypass surgery. It cuts you open, repairs the block, and then sews you up, leaving an ugly scar. It solves the immediate

problem but does not address the actual cause of the disease. The surgery is painful and it takes time to heal.

For some, divorce is more like cosmetic surgery. It changes things on the outside, but nothing changes on the inside. Everything appears different on the outside but for appearances sake only.

However, if a divorce is more like heart transplant surgery, a new and stronger heart and significant internal changes may take place. Which procedure describes your divorce?

Most of us will experience some kind of relationship surgery in our lives, especially in meaningful long-term relationships. All relationships need periods of turmoil and stress, re-evaluation and rebuilding. It is through pain that we grow the strongest. The heart that is exercised and pushed to its limits is stronger for the experience.

Dealing with Change

It is one thing to be forced to deal with change and the stress that comes with it, both the good stress and the bad, and it is another thing to seek it out because you feel that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. We all know people whose addresses and phone numbers must be recorded in pencil. They are forever changing jobs, addresses, friends and cars—just about everything in their lives they deem transient or expendable.

For these individuals, staying married and working through things might be more stressful and traumatic than divorce. They would rather trade in the old spouse for a newer model

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because they do not want to do the tough work necessary to make a relationship last. It is easier for them to just start over with someone else than it is to deal with their own internal problems. Going *out there* is easier than going *in here*.

To truly get beyond the divorce decree, you must reconcile your ego with all the changes and allow a more spiritual perspective to emerge.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are people who literally hate change to the point of complete avoidance. They will stick with someone or something no matter how awful it is just to avoid confrontation or change. They will excuse away abuse, stick with a job they hate, ignore intolerable behavior, or deny with their dying breath that anything is wrong. On appearance, they can seem to be incredibly stoic people, sometimes to the point of martyrdom. But they risk getting eaten up on the inside.

Ask yourself:

- ✧ Do you see a pattern to how you react to change?
- ✧ Do either you or your CIP avoid or seek change to the extreme?
- ✧ Are there some kinds of change that are easier for you to deal with than others?
- ✧ Is your attitude to change similar to or different from that of your CIP?
- ✧ Do you process changes quickly and feel ready to move on, or do you often feel stuck and indecisive?

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Typically, when people get what they need from a certain period in life, they do not want to remain there. They either lack or reject those feelings of being stuck. They have learned what is important for them to learn, and they feel ready to move on to the next level, much like moving from one grade to the next in school.

Accomplishing what we consciously and intuitively know we were meant to do during any period of our life helps us to accept the bad with the good and prepares us to move on and welcome the next phase. This is true whether we are talking about the phases we go through as we get older or about the life of an intimate relationship.

Therefore, sometimes when a person wants to end an intimate relationship, it is a sign that they have learned all that they can from being in a relationship with their partner. They feel their growth has ceased. And then again, a person may want a divorce because their ego no longer wants to cope with the lessons the relationship is giving them. They need space and a break from the struggle.

On the flip side another person may be resistant to the marriage ending because they are *not* ready to move on. Somehow they intuitively know they have more work to do. They are not stuck; they are steadfast, willing to keep on learning.

And then again, their resistance could be a sign of stubbornness or a way of having control. They are not ready to grow and no one is going to tell them to move on until they say it's time to move on.

As you can see, divorce produces a variety of feelings about moving on, where moving on can mean one thing to one

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person and something completely different to someone else. What does moving on mean to you?

Generally speaking, divorce usually happens for one of two reasons. Either one or both partners have learned their lessons, feel they have stopped growing and learning and are ready to move on. Or the lessons got too tough and one or both partners needed a break. Marriage, as part of the life experience, is a great teacher. The problem is that the tests (changes) come first, and we learn the lessons later.

Are you ready to move on because you have learned the lessons your relationship has presented you or do you just need a break?

When you can accept and embrace the changes in yourself and in your CIP, and understand how those changes have impacted your relationship, then you are in a much better position to learn what life is trying to teach you. This is what it feels like to grow and evolve.

Facing Your Issues and Fears

As you move through the process of divorce, you will undoubtedly encounter your issues. These issues become the impasses that keep you from experiencing peace and fulfillment and keep you stuck. It is important to realize that everyone has issues. Everyone can claim a dysfunctional family or less than ideal past. Just about everyone can claim they got dealt a bad hand. Many of us think that life is not fair, or at least it does not appear to be very fair. And it probably never will be.

Every relationship or marriage has obstacles to overcome and life is a series of challenging events. The primary differences between a married couple who fulfills the vow, “Till death us do part,” and a couple who opts for, “Till divorce us do part,” are their perspectives and approaches to change and the lessons they are meant to learn. A relationship is not a success just because a couple stays married, nor should it be deemed a failure just because it ends in divorce.

There are many couples who stay married and have unsuccessful relationships. The legal part of the marriage survives but the spirit of the marriage dies and is never resurrected, even “till death them do part.” On the other hand, there are divorced couples who have achieved a successful, workable relationship.

“Successful relationship” is a relative term, determined more by how each couple, individually and together, embraces changes in their relationship and uses those changes so they can both become happy and fulfilled.

Plot Points

To help you better understand how you have processed change in the past, let’s take a mental hike down the path of your relationship. Recall any major event or experience that dramatically altered your life and the path of your relationship. Maybe it was a job change, the birth of a child, a move, health problems, an affair or a death in the family. If you were to write down your relationship’s life story, these places in your life would be called “plot points” or events that changed its direction.

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How have you responded to the major plot points in your relationship? Did you respond with thought, purpose and clarity, or did you react emotionally to the event with a lack of maturity and composure? Remember, plot points just represent events. They are often the catalysts that bring your issues to light. They do this by triggering deep-seated emotions, sometimes from past hurts and sometimes from our present perceptions.

A relationship is not a success just because a couple stays married, nor should it be deemed a failure just because it ends in divorce.

Your ego's interpretation of how a particular event affected and changed you and your relationship often is what gives it meaning and influence. Reflect back on the plot points of your relationship and ask your spirit how it would interpret them? The spirit and the ego rarely view life the same way.

Fear is often an emotion that people feel when there is a plot-point event in their life. Fear is also a major cause of stress. Remember, fear comes from the ego side and fear is a natural and normal reaction to change.

For instance, as joyful as it is to have a baby, get a promotion or buy a new house, many people experience these positive changes with a mixture of excitement and fear—such as the fear of inadequacy. What first-time mother does not fear her ability to be a good mother? What first-time homeowner does not experience some fear and trepidation about taking on the burden of a mortgage payment and the upkeep of a home? Our fears can make even these positive events stressful.

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When you examine how you have handled the plot points in your past and what fears resulted from those experiences, it will give you a good insight into your personal issues. Some of the biggest and most common fears we can have are:

- ✧ fear of abandonment or rejection;
- ✧ fear of success or failure;
- ✧ fear for our safety;
- ✧ fear of doing without.

It's normal to have fears. The trick is to not let them control us. They control us by having a grip over us that we actually embrace. We embrace them by forgetting that:

We have the fear; the fear doesn't have us.

You cannot let go of something until you know you are holding on to it. You cannot know you are holding on to something until you can identify it. You will never completely overcome your fears, but when life's changes bring them to the surface, you can learn to identify them better and not let them dictate your life.

Fears Are Boulders

When you feel stress, what issues or fears are you dealing with? One of the functions of stress is to help us identify our fears. We wouldn't feel stress if we weren't afraid of something. What old or new fears are you experiencing as a result of your separation or divorce?

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If you have been able to identify at least one issue and the corresponding fear that you experience in your relationship, then imagine that this issue and the negatively charged, fear-ridden feelings are literally physical boulders blocking your path.

The impasses, the boulders in your life and in your relationship, present three options:

1. You can sit and cry about the boulders and stay stuck;
2. You can curse and blame them or others for putting them in your way and turn around to avoid them altogether; or
3. You can acknowledge the boulders, bless them for the challenge they offer and see them merely as detours on your path that are there for your growth.

Any of these may come into play as you move through your fears and issues during the process of divorce. You may have given up on the marriage, feel like a victim and become stuck in that role. Long after the divorce, if you still play the victim, you will still be stuck, like the person who feels victimized by a boulder blocking their way.

When a divorce is combative, you may curse the problems that led to the divorce and curse the divorce process, but fail to examine what went wrong. You may vow to never marry again or become determined to marry the “right” person next time. If so, you are like the person who avoids the boulder but merely faces the same boulder in a new relationship.

But when you acknowledge your issues and identify your fears as you go through the separation and divorce process and

come to some understanding of how you have allowed them to control you, you are in a much better position to work on them openly and honestly. This kind of work will prepare you to have a healthy relationship in the future.

You then become like the person who sees the boulder in their path not as a blockade to growth but as a challenge to grow. When you accept an issue as the challenge it is it makes it easier to let go of past perceptions of who you and your partner were to one another. This kind of perspective gives rise to the space to grow in the present.

Divorce, Change and Your Children

It is impossible to predict with any certainty how a divorce will affect your children. They will go through significant physical, emotional and psychological changes over the years, some because they are simply growing and evolving, and others because they are responding to the divorce. You may not be able to tell which is which. What you can do, though, is not make *how* you got divorced the scapegoat for your children's difficulties.

As Stuart Webb and Ron Ousky point out in their book, *The Collaborative Way to Divorce*, the way two people handle themselves and the process of divorce has more impact on their children than the fact that the marriage has come to an end.

Your children will undoubtedly be changed by the emotions they experience as your family goes through the divorce process. Anger and sadness usually top the list of emotions. Do not feed

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their anger by your actions. They can be sad and they can be angry with you and the situation, but with your compassion and guidance, they can still come to terms with the divorce.

Carl Jung is said to have likened the relationship between two people to a chemical reaction where both are transformed. Let the relationship's changes become a transforming process, not only for the two of you, but also for your family and friends. Every relationship we have has the potential to change us. Why not make your divorce experience a positive influence for others who might face similar circumstances. Show others through your experience how to transform a failed marriage into a successful divorce.

Applying the Serenity Prayer to the Process

The well-known “Serenity Prayer” offers wise guidance for those facing significant changes—like divorce—in their lives. Although many people can recite this prayer from memory, how many practice the advice?

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

Think about how you could apply this to your personal situation. What aspects of your current life and relationship will you need to accept? Are you struggling to accept your CIP's personality traits, core beliefs or past and present behavior? For

The way two people handle themselves and the process of divorce has more impact on their children than the fact that the marriage has come to an end.

that matter, what are you struggling to accept about yourself? What can you change about yourself that would improve your relationship? What do you think your CIP needs to change to improve your relationship?

It is helpful and comforting to know that acceptance and approval are not synonymous. Validation does not mean that you validate the behavior, only that you validate the “what is” of the situation.

For instance, there was a husband who liked to drink, and according to his wife, he drank a lot. In fact, she accused him of being an alcoholic and felt his drinking interfered with their relationship. He rejected this notion because he believed he drank with moderation. Hence, they had frequent arguments about his drinking and were heading for divorce. They each felt the other one was wrong and they each accused the other of not listening. They both felt that their feelings were not being validated.

Fighting about the drinking is not the real problem. Stating, defending and explaining what we think and how we feel is an important part of healthy relationships. Arguing your opinions and feelings is often good and necessary. Acceptance, in this instance, does not mean that she needed to accept his current drinking behavior or that he needed to accept her assessment of him as an alcoholic. Acceptance is validating the “what is” for the other.

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Take a point of contention in your own relationship and think about it in terms of the following scenario. The two of you are at a huge mega mall and have become separated following a disagreement. You each look at a billboard map of the mall's layout and you both find the big red star with the words "You Are Here" on it. If you talk to one another on your cell phones and state your exact positions, it helps you figure out which way to go in order to find one another.

Until you know and accept where you both are, either figuratively or literally, you cannot make a change in your course that, with any certainty, will send you heading in the right direction to bring you together.

You could substitute almost any difference of opinion between two people in this example and it still applies. No matter how far apart two people are about an issue, until each knows and accepts (validates) each other's feelings, movement or change is bound to be a struggle.

The last line of the "Serenity Prayer" presents a provocative statement that can be posed as a question. How do you decide when to accept things as they are and when to change them? Remember, you do not need to feel that if you accept the "what is" of a situation or a person, you have to suck it up and live with it. You can accept something as it is in the moment and still want to change it.

Wisdom and Intuition

Wisdom comes into play as you get a sense of when to accept something and when you need to muster the courage to change

it. Wisdom is knowing what to do in a difficult situation. And that keeps you from feeling the “woulda, coulda and shouldas” so often felt in life.

The frustrating thing about wisdom is that it rarely announces itself and can come to you in many different ways. Wisdom can be an instantaneous phenomenon, such as a flash of insight. This is what some refer to as inspiration. Literally defined, inspiration means “in spirit.” You suddenly get a specific and spontaneous idea or answer to a problem that comes to you effortlessly. It is often based on acquired knowledge or past experience.

Wisdom may also be thought of as intuition. Intuition comes from the Latin word *intueri*, which means “to look within.” Intuition is a calm sense of knowing without understanding exactly where the knowing comes from. Intuition can, but does not always, make sense.

The voice of your higher self that you experience through flashes of inspiration or through a calm sense of intuition is one way your wisdom reveals itself. It can come to you at any time. It is often beyond words, beyond explanation.

In some ways, meditating or listening to the voice of your higher self can be compared to pressing a radio’s “on” button. A radio that is turned off never relays the incoming signal. When first turned on a radio may only get static. But when someone takes the time to move the tuning knob, a clearer signal comes through. That’s what meditating is—an act of tuning in.

Your wisdom becomes accessible when you become receptive to receiving it and you do this by taking the time to tune in.

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You give wisdom a channel to communicate to you when you are willing to ask the questions and prepare yourself to receive the answers.

Your intuition probably had something to do with your reading this book. Either consciously or at a subconscious level, you were looking for help in dealing with your divorce or your marriage or a past relationship that still brings you pain. *Divorce Vows* poses questions for you to ponder that you may never have otherwise considered, and receiving the right answers starts with asking the right questions. All wisdom starts first with a question.

Is Divorce the Answer?

Divorce can be a very humbling experience if you see it as “the answer.” A corresponding question to ask might be, “Is a divorce going to bring about changes that I can use to be happy?” The question is not, “Is divorce going to *make* me happy or *make* me miserable?” Like marriage, divorce only sets up the rules. It is up to you to play it out.

Are you willing to accept the changes that are taking place in your life? If so, then what are you doing proactively? Think of all the areas in your life that could be dramatically changed because of the divorce, such as your finances, where you live, your physical and emotional health and the time with your children. What are you specifically doing to ensure that these changes do not adversely affect your life and the lives of your children?

Become the weather forecaster of your life and be on the lookout for warning signs. You cannot predict all the changes

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with any certainty, but the thunderstorms in life rarely come without warning. You may not feel capable of recognizing the warning signs, so do not hesitate to solicit help. Reach out and ask for professional help in dealing with the changes and read other books on spiritual growth and healthy relationships.

Vow Three highlights the need to address your relationship to change. Be willing to look squarely and openly at all the changes that have already taken place and those to come:

- ✧ What will you need to accept today to make it possible for an improved future relationship with your CIP?
- ✧ What do you need to let go of?
- ✧ What is it about yourself that you have the courage to work on and change for the better?

Separation and divorce offer the perfect opportunity for individuals to do some much needed soul work. It is a time to question many things about your life. As was mentioned before, when you are ready, the teacher will come. Whether you know it or not, you will continue to work on your relationship at some level even after the divorce. *Why? Because your subconscious mind will never forget a problem or a question that your conscious mind cannot answer.*

**All wisdom starts first
with a question.**

Be willing to bring this work to the surface and consciously deal with the results as often as you can. Take a break

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when you need a rest. Become a detective in your own life. Be curious about what is really going on. Seek out people who can help you sort things out. You can deal consciously with the changes and issues that your relationship brought you or you can deal with them subconsciously in other areas of your life. If you do not confront your issues now, they are much more likely to resurface in a future relationship.

People are attracted to one another for a reason. Gary Zukav points out in *The Heart of the Soul*, that our lives reflect our soul's needs. Take the time to wrestle with the reasons why you might be in each other's lives. Even if you do not come to any definite conclusions right away, the process of sorting through the possibilities is enlightening. It expands your perspective about your relationship and yourself. This will go a long way in helping you make the relationship and the changes that are taking place work for you instead of against you. Change is not necessarily good or bad; it is just what exists in a moment of time.

***Accept whatever comes to you
woven in the pattern of your destiny,
for what could more aptly fit your needs.***

—Marcus Aurelius

Exercise 3: The Three Lists

This is an exercise to help you accept *what is*, let go of *what was*, and have a vision of *what could be* about your relationship. Your assignment is to write down descriptions about your relationship on three pieces of paper.

On the first piece of paper, write down at least five things about your relationship that were true in your past and describe each of them in a few sentences. This is a list of *what was* about your relationship. The list could include descriptions of both positive and negative aspects of your past relationship, things you did together, feelings you used to have, any memory, big or small.

Next, on a separate piece of paper describe in a few sentences five aspects about your current relationship. This list is the *what is* of your relationship as it is now. Again, the list can be about any aspect of your relationship, good or bad.

Next, write down five things that are *what could be*. This list could be about how you want your relationship with your CIP to be in the future. It could be a list of feelings you want to have about your relationship relating to peace and closure. It could even be a list of what it could be like to be in a relationship with someone new. This *what could be* list is whatever you want it to be and it could describe any future time frame. It's your future. Therefore, it's your choice. Keep all of these lists accessible so you can add *entries* to them whenever you want.

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Once you have your lists, there are a number of things you can do to process them. For the *what was* list you might want to reflect on each entry one at a time. When you feel you are emotionally ready to let go of that entry cross a line through it, just as you cross off an entry on a “to do” list. Try not to cross off something until you feel you have made at least some progress in reconciling yourself with it. Do the same with each entry on the list.

It’s okay if the feelings about *what was* come up again, even after you thought you had reconciled yourself with it. Life’s “to do lists” usually have ongoing, recurring activities. Think of it like weeding a garden. Weeds will almost always return but the goal is to keep them to a minimum so that they are less of a nuisance. So write down the *what was* entry again and reflect on your feelings about it as many times as you need to, each time going a little deeper with your feelings of reconciliation. Keep working with them until they surface with less frequency or maybe until they stop surfacing altogether.

Another process you could try is to write each entry on a separate piece of paper and burn it in the fireplace or tear it up and throw the pieces in a moving body of water such as a river or the ocean and watch them float away. You could even put the piece of paper in a balloon. Blow the balloon up and let it go in the wind. The main thing is to acknowledge the release of the *what was* aspect of your

Continued on next page

relationship and work on ways to reconcile with them in your heart in order for you to have some closure.

To process the *what is* list, put this list on your bedside table, on your bathroom mirror, or on your refrigerator door. Glance at the list each day and acknowledge what you are dealing with, be it positive or negative. After you read the more difficult or painful aspects of your relationship, be quiet and calmly ask for guidance in dealing with them. Breathe deeply as you ask, while visualizing yourself inhaling and being inspired by wisdom and the clarity to know how to deal with it. After you read the more positive entries about your relationship simply say, “Thank you.”

To process the *what could be* list, make multiple copies and scatter them about your life out of direct sight. You could put one under your pillow or mattress, one in the glove compartment of your car, one on the top of your toilet lid, and one in your purse, day planner or briefcase. Put them in places you don’t readily see every day. Your higher self will know that they are there. It’s like putting an idea on the back burner and letting it simmer. Just be close to your dreams and ideals. Have them around you, then go about your daily business, and know that you will somehow be intuitively guided to make your wishes of a better relationship a reality.



Vow Four



*I will communicate with integrity and
treat you with respect.*

*I will not lie, be deceitful, or show contempt
for you as a person.*

You have the right to remain silent.

Anything you say

(or even thought about saying)

will be held against you.

You have the right to an attorney.

You may kiss the bride.

Vow Four: Communication & Integrity

Good communication is the foundation of successful relationships. The level of satisfaction partners feel in their relationship is often directly correlated to each partner's willingness and ability to communicate and many couples seek divorce mainly because they failed to communicate to each other's satisfaction.

Communication has two basic components: speaking (expressing) and listening (receiving). As important as the quantity of communication may be, quality trumps quantity any day. The quality of communication comes down to each partner's ability and willingness to speak and act with integrity. That means being honest and creating trust where you each can express your true feelings and hear those of the other.

Below are questions for you to think about regarding the quantity and quality of communication as you reflect back on your marriage:

- ✧ Was there integrity in your communication?
- ✧ Did you communicate when it was important to do so, or did you avoid communicating when the tension built up?
- ✧ Were you often sarcastic or condescending in tone even though you spoke the truth?
- ✧ Did you listen to your CIP or did you just remain quiet, contemplating what you were going to say next?

- ✧ Did you feel safe to share your deepest emotions?
- ✧ Did you show respect for each other's feelings?

Bringing Integrity and Respect to the Process

Just as the integrity of a physical bridge is jeopardized if its foundation erodes, a relationship will be jeopardized if its foundation erodes due to a lack of integrity and respect. This is not only true where communication is concerned, but it is also true with every other aspect of the relationship. One of the most challenging aspects of marriage, or any relationship, is being able to communicate with integrity, and this is never more true than when a relationship goes through a divorce.

Most divorcing couples need a readjustment period to reestablish boundaries, expectations and the level of integrity with which they feel comfortable. For a more positive personal life and a new, more workable relationship with your CIP, it is vital that you explore your own commitment to integrity and develop respect for boundaries, both yours and those of your CIP.

“Divorce with integrity” is not the mantra these days, yet we would have a better world if it was. As a culture, we do not teach our young people to measure success or progress based on ethical yardsticks, but, instead, on superficial accomplishments. Too often we promote “keeping up with the Joneses.” Our society values the accumulation of money, power, and recognition, oftentimes regardless of the means. The same could be said for many divorce settlements.

Vow Four: Communication & Integrity

Frequently you have heard someone brag about their monetary divorce settlement and how they “won” in court. You seldom hear someone boast of how respectful they were or how they were able to retain their dignity and integrity during the process. Couples would reach a workable post-divorce relationship more quickly, with fewer battle scars and create healthier future relationships, if they were not only encouraged but *expected* to be more cooperative, civil and responsible throughout the divorce.

What couple, who had a litigious and financially draining divorce, would do it all over again the same way? Probably not very many. Unfortunately, their experiences are being ignored because the prevailing attitude in society is that there must be confrontation between the parties in order for divorce to be justified. This is similar to the idea that a certain number of deaths must occur at a treacherous intersection before a traffic light is installed.

How much emotional carnage do we have to endure before we wake up and realize that we need to approach these relationship crossroads with at least some warning signs and yellow blinking lights? Our relationships try to survive in a world in which the speed of life exceeds our ability to process it all. What we need to do is slow down and reconnect with what is really important. Having failed in that, when we crash and burn we have no one to blame but ourselves.

There is clear evidence that integrity and respect in our society are passé virtues. Scandals, unaccountability, and irresponsibility in professional and personal lives run rampant. It is now possible for the whole world to witness our despicable

behavior via cell phones or on YouTube as well as on the old standbys, TV, radio and in print media.

We are indirectly taught that you do not need integrity if you have fame and fortune. Overt displays of bad behavior that get rewards and attention breed more of the same. Our marriages and our families, the very foundation of who we are collectively, are constantly undermined as they struggle to survive in a society that treats truth as no more than a tradable and disposable commodity.

Wanting to appear nonjudgmental has become more virtuous than demanding appropriate behavior. Nowadays, when people lie and fail to take responsibility for their actions they are too often encouraged to spin the events into such a convoluted story just to create distraction and confusion. Compartmentalizing behavior through legal maneuvering often replaces moral and ethical responsibility. Looking right seems to be better than actually being right. After all, perception is reality. Or is it?

How much of this overall attitude has fostered our tolerance of nasty divorce behavior? A great deal! We have created an environment in which thoughtful and decent people are coerced into behaving in ways that they never thought possible, all because of a morally dumbed down acceptance level. Lowering the bar is always easier than trying to live up to higher standards. Fewer people seem to abide by the commandment, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," especially during a divorce.

Unfaithfulness in a marriage is a good example. As a society, we often do not simply feel sorry for the partner whose spouse

has cheated on them, but we also have an insatiable need to assign blame. The “hurt” partner is given all kinds of latitude if they react by lashing out at his or her spouse, not just legally, but professionally and personally too, regardless of the consequences for their children. We cannot go through the check-out at the local grocery store without being bombarded with headlines (whether true or not) regarding the lives of glamorous people as they play out their conflicts in the media. Sordid details of scandal and revenge fuel the fire of the notion that their inflammatory behavior is somehow acceptable, or at least excusable.

The Popular “Pre-Nup” and the Legal System

There is also the growing use of pre-nuptial agreements in recent years. It shows how two people, who are supposedly in love, struggle to operate from a base of simple, personal integrity. Prenuptials, in a way, set people up for failure from the start. Instead of relying on their heart’s love and intuitive guidance, they are relying more and more on contract law to enforce legal integrity in lieu of personal integrity.

Have we lost trust in the power of love? Has the acceptance of the rising divorce rate and our tolerance of contentious divorces led us to think that what we need instead are more escape clauses? From this growing propensity, one could conclude that the analytical and legal mind has taken over and our spiritual side has been “voted off the island.”

Sadly, integrity and mutual respect are not promoted, not just by a couple’s personal value system but sometimes by the

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legal system as well. Because a court system is set up to have a victor and a loser, and personal finances and pride are at stake, there is often no emphasis put on integrity and respect, except that which is required by law. Finding loopholes, clever legal interpretation, and fancy legal tap dancing are rewarded instead.

There are, of course, times when the legal system is successful at preventing or breaking up a fight—some attorneys and judges are good at calming the parties down—but there are also many times when the legal system seems to encourage conflict. In many divorces the attorneys and the court system actually make matters worse and escalate the tension between the couple. When our legal system dissuades us from acting with decency and integrity, then we all suffer.

If you have started the legal process, how has your legal counsel encouraged you to act? Do you feel that your self-respect has been compromised somewhere along the way? Have you lost touch with who you really want to be?

Nasty, stressful divorces create nasty, stressed-out people and it is almost unavoidable that this stress is passed on to the children. The cumulative damage being done, not just to the individuals, but to society as a whole, is tremendous when you consider that two and a half million couples divorce every year in the United States alone!

Ironically, we seem more concerned about the exposure of our children to secondhand smoke than we are about our children's exposure to firsthand animosity between their parents. Children inevitably are hurt by divorce. Their lives are drastically changed because their mom and dad are no longer together, but at least the negative effects can be mitigated if the

parents were counseled and expected to behave and communicate with more integrity and civility.

The Personal Mission Statement

How do you incorporate more integrity in your divorce and post-divorce relationship? One strategy you could consider is to write a personal mission statement regarding your own behavior with your family. This personal statement could be used as a benchmark before and after the decree. Your statement should specifically apply to your relationship and interactions with your CIP, your children, and the legal procedure.

It should include important commitments you wish to make and keep such as paying your child support on time, arriving on time to pick up or drop off the kids, calling when you said you would, refraining from using disparaging language or controlling your temper.

It should include legal commitments as well, such as operating with full disclosure and being equitable in the division of property. You might want to reread *Vow Three* and revisit the role your ego is playing because it is best to keep your ego out of this statement as much as possible.

The personal mission statement is not about physical survival, which is the goal of the ego, but about spiritual survival. Your mission statement can be as detailed or as general as you want. It all depends on your willingness to participate and commit.

Think of this statement as a collection of agreements you make to yourself that are beyond the decree. Once you commit,

When our legal system dissuades us from acting with decency and integrity, then we all suffer.

this is a binding contract you have made with yourself. Your integrity with yourself is what's at stake. Maintaining or restoring your self-respect is the goal. The important thing is to write it down!

Once you have this statement in writing, you have, in effect, provided yourself with a game plan to follow. Refer to it now and then to remind yourself of your intentions and then critique yourself on how you are doing. Which statements are easier to abide by than others? Who or what makes it more difficult to follow these guidelines—your own perspective or the behavior of your CIP? In other words, does your CIP really sabotage your efforts or do you undermine yourself sometimes by your own negative thinking?

Try to operate from this mission statement as you deal with your CIP and as you interact with your kids. Have this statement in mind when you are in the lawyer's office too. Use it as a way of determining how well you are meeting your personal commitments and honoring your word. You are the one you have to live with. Feel proud to go home with yourself.

Be willing to ask your family and friends to support you in your efforts to conduct yourself honorably throughout the divorce process. Share your mission statement with them and ask them to gently remind you of your intentions when you fall off the wagon. Demonstrate that you are receptive to their support and more than anything you want to be a person who takes the high road, even when that road is difficult.

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When the road gets too difficult then do not hesitate to seek out others to lean on, people who are more spiritually minded. Read books, research the internet for resource material and find a support group who can be encouraging and sympathetic with your goal of being a person who puts character first. There is great solace when we surround ourselves with loving, spiritually strong support. Being a person of integrity is not an easy assignment in today's climate and most of us cannot do it alone. Asking for help is one of the first signs of spiritual courage as well as spiritual wisdom.

Do not worry if your CIP does not reciprocate. That would be nice, but this is about your process, not theirs. It is about who you are and who you want to be. It is not about who they are and their choices.

Also, do not be afraid to slip up and admit it. It is gutsy enough just to put your intentions out there. Being accountable for your mistakes is huge when it comes to making things work. It brings authenticity to the situation. If your CIP tries to use your mistakes against you, take the blows with honor. There is no shame in making a mistake if you are truly trying to be a better person in this stressful time. So, you failed to keep your ego under wraps and you slipped up. Don't we all? Authenticity is about being honest about being human. It is not about being perfect. None of us are.

If appropriate, engage your CIP in the process by asking if they are willing to behave with increased integrity and, if so, in what ways. Tell them point blank that from here on out you want both of you to be truthful and respectful. By taking the lead, you may challenge them to raise their level of behavior

too. Who knows? Perhaps you can elevate the whole divorce process and end up with a relationship that is actually better than it was when you were married.

This is not going to work for every couple or every situation. However, no matter the outcome, no matter the consequences, you cannot go wrong if you make integrity a priority in your own life, even if doing so in the divorce process is a difficult challenge. By thinking of your behavior in terms of who you want to be now, not just in your relationship with your CIP and your children, but in all future relationships, you are using your divorce as a springboard for making positive changes in your life.

Old patterns of behavior are hard to break. Just like the cookies on a computer hard drive, old programs remain unless we take steps to remove or change and update them.

Toxic People

Some people find it almost impossible to be truthful. They do not want to be restricted by expectations of honesty, and they definitely do not want to be held accountable. These are extremely frustrating and toxic people to deal with.

If your partner is one of these people, and is someone who resorts to yelling, being belligerent and manipulation, do not let their behavior get the best of you. Keep your focus on your behavior. If all you can achieve are just small strides in being more open with your feelings, more accountable for your own actions, and more trustworthy in your commitments, any slight progress will be something you can be proud of.

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For a funny take on the subject of lying and living without integrity, watch the movie *Liar, Liar*, starring Jim Carey. In one scene, the young son of Jim Carey's character asks his father why he lies. His father tries to evade the issue by saying that everyone lies, but the son says, with soulful eyes, "Then why does it only hurt when you lie?" By the end of the movie, Carey's character discovers that telling the truth can be a liberating experience for everyone involved.

The Truth is Freeing

In the Bible, verse John 8:32 states, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." This statement particularly holds true for communication between two married people. Deep down, we all want the truth, no matter how much it hurts or how difficult it is to deal with. In the end the truth is freeing because it allows you to make choices for yourself about what you will do with the information, both internally (with your feelings) and externally (with your behavior).

How do you feel when your CIP is truthful with you? How do you feel when you know your CIP has lied to you? You cannot control how truthful your CIP is, but you can certainly control the truth of your own statements. Being truthful with another makes us bigger than our circumstances, bigger than we thought we were. That is what relationships should be about—supporting each other to be greater than the context, greater than we thought we were.

Authenticity is about being honest about being human. It is not about being perfect.

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Liar, Liar also shows the damage that lies told by a parent can do to a child. Your child may go into the world with a damaged sense of trust, believing that no one can be trusted if they feel that you are dishonest and untrustworthy. Issues revolving around trust may then plague their relationships perpetuating the cycle of lies.

Is *Vow Four* going to be easy? Probably not. The truth is sometimes slippery. It is not always easy to put your finger on true feelings. Also, feelings change; facts are often unclear. Circumstances can change. Being honest, trustworthy and respectful under stressful circumstances and with certain people can seem virtually impossible. If you have difficulty being honest with your CIP, consider the following questions:

- ✧ If you cannot be 100 percent honest with your CIP would you at least be willing to admit to yourself when you are not?
- ✧ What is it about your relationship with your CIP that makes you inclined to lie to them?
- ✧ What reaction or consequence are you trying to avoid?
- ✧ What behavior or lie of your own might you be trying to cover up?

Be careful not to fool yourself into believing that your CIP deserves to be lied to. That is your ego talking. If you have been lied to or otherwise mistreated by your CIP, it may be tempting to treat them in kind, but when you reciprocate with lies, you join them in the gutter. The decent, loving person that you know you can be does not deserve to be undermined like that.

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When you lie or act with contempt, you hurt yourself far more than you realize. Lies muddy the water, not just between you and the person you have lied to, but between you and your self-respect. Every time you lie, you chip away at your own integrity.

Divorce is riddled with mixed emotions and unsettling feelings. Sometimes you have a sense that the truth might cause more conflict than a little “white lie.” But even white lies, as innocuous as they may seem, are still lies. Avoid them if you can. For instance, if you feel you must tell a white lie in order to not hurt your CIP’s feelings, at least own up to it to yourself. Acknowledge that you told one and be really clear about why and what you think is the benefit of telling it. Is the “less than the truth” statement spiritually motivated or did your ego play a role in it?

This line of thinking leads straight to the old problem of denial. Egos are really good at denial. Denial protects us from difficult truths we perceive to threaten our survival. For the sake of *Vow Four*, see if you can catch yourself trying to deny that you have lied and admit to yourself the real truth about your motives.

Perhaps you will not be able to correct the damage done between you and your CIP with this truthful approach to a “new” relationship, but this heightened awareness will be helpful in future relationships. Look at your divorce as an opportunity to challenge yourself in a number of important areas and to make positive changes. It is challenging to be a person of integrity and authenticity in the face of a very difficult situation, but imagine the growth possible, even if you do not reach your expectations all the time. Integrity is the compass, not the destination.

Integrity is Being Green

Before you think this is too much trouble or a ridiculous idea, realize that you have probably changed your thoughts and personal behavior in other areas for the common good. Consider the environment, for instance. It has become very popular and even profitable to personally think and act “green” these days.

For years people have been encouraged to conserve energy, recycle, reuse, cut back on unnecessary waste, and dispose of the waste they produce in cleaner, more efficient ways. You, as an average citizen, have been asked, even required in some cases, to treat the planet with more dignity and respect.

Yet divorced couples often fail to apply this same stewardship to the small, little patch of the world called their family. We have come to accept the toxic waste of burned-out relationships as an acceptable byproduct of marital disharmony. We may or may not be able to decrease the divorce rate, but we can have higher, “cleaner” standards of behavior for divorcing

**Integrity is the compass,
not the destination.**

parents, much in the same way we have demanded changes in the way we expect one another to dispose of their environmental waste.

Love is a form of human energy and it is one of our most precious natural resources. It is nurtured and harvested through human beings, and the family unit is its main refinery. Whether or not we use this resource effectively, it is up to each of us to

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choose how we produce it, use it, recycle it, transform it or dispose of it. Being encouraged to separate our lies from the truth and recycle and share our love with respect and integrity is

Love is a form of human energy and it is one of our most precious natural resources.

along the same line as asking people to separate their garbage into different colored bins, give away items instead of throwing them away, turn off or down appliances, and rideshare. Both efforts are trying to create a better, cleaner, healthier planet.

If we want our culture to prosper, and if we want our children to grow into trustworthy and responsible inheritors of everything we leave them, then we must take steps to clean up our act, inside and out. What kind of world do we want to pass on? Let's start by paying more attention to what we are teaching our children about real love, truth and integrity.

It is admirable that we want to save the planet and be respectful caretakers in order to leave a better world for our children. But let's not forget to save the people too. We can start by investing in just two people at a time and let the theory of compounding interest take over from there. If more of us did this kind of investing we would leave our children a better world. We all might be better people if we could just live by this motto:

Invest in clean energy . . . Love.

Exercise 4: Survivor—Lost On Integrity Island

So, you have read this chapter and you are still not quite sure why integrity is such a big deal. Yes, you know it is important and you would like to think you are a person of integrity. But, like the father in the movie *Liar, Liar*, you may believe that everyone lies, everyone at least “fudges” the truth. And in today’s world, wouldn’t it be suicide to always tell the truth, especially in a relationship and in particular in a divorce?

Okay. Granted, telling the truth 100 percent of the time really sets the bar up there. There are times when telling all would be inadvisable. Having tact is sometimes more prudent than blunt honesty. One funny definition of tact is “the ability to tell someone to go to hell and they’re glad they’re on their way.” Many of us find tact a skill we cannot seem to master. Our integrity is challenged most every day. It takes lots of discretion to know when it is advisable to “tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

Here is an exercise that is quite revealing about integrity and all that it encompasses. It will demonstrate just how important integrity is and how it affects all of us in many areas of our lives. It is best to use your notebook, but even if you just commit to do it in your head, this exercise is still thought-provoking.

The Mission

You have just volunteered to be a spy for a search and rescue team. You will be deported for a week to Integrity Island (which is actually just another name for the little island called your immediate world). Integrity has been reported lost and was last seen somewhere on the island, but its whereabouts is still not clear. Your job is to locate Integrity, rescue it if you can and report its status back to mission control (your notebook). You are not to reveal your mission to anyone, nor are you to engage with the enemy. (This means do not get into any verbal fights.)

Integrity, remember, has to do with things like truthfulness, trust, authenticity, and respect. You have been told that Integrity might be found in plain sight or it might be camouflaged as others have disguised it.

To find Integrity you will have to search through fields of:

- ✧ print media (newspapers, magazines, advertisements, books),*
- ✧ video media (news programs, movies, television shows, commercials, the Internet),*
- ✧ your home or place of work (family, fellow co-workers, and customers), and*
- ✧ the everyday conversations you overhear.*

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When you find clues to where Integrity is hiding (or suspect it is has been taken hostage) as you go about your mission, record your findings in your notebook. Listen for words and phrases such as trust, truth, count on, reliable, lied to, authentic, genuine, real, fabricated, phony, fake, respected, honorable, forthright, and accountable. Whenever one of these words (or others relating to Integrity) appears in your immediate world, write down where you found it and its circumstance. Reveal and rescue it if you can. At the end of the week, read over your report.

From this exercise you will see that many of your emotional reactions to people and decisions you make—such as what product to buy, who to do business with, which people to trust, whom to vote for, or what information to believe—is determined by your trust and belief in someone or something, which includes the trust you have in yourself.

This exercise is not meant to be just a week long game of finding integrity in your external world. It is meant to inspire you to find and develop your own personal integrity and encourage you to make it an important part of your everyday life and of all your relationships.



Vow Five



I will forgive both of us for our misunderstandings.

*I will not forget that there are lessons
we can learn from our mistakes.*

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

—Luke 23:34

Forgiveness is a cornerstone of any relationship. Forgive! It is a simple, one word commandment, and yet it is probably the most overlooked and diminished healing force in many relationships. People frequently say, “I’m sorry.” But the true meaning and implication of this simple request for forgiveness is often not fully explored.

In many marriages, couples forgive just enough to get past the immediate conflict so they can go about their daily lives. The superficial words and the giving of flowers is a quick cure-all to ease the tension. But when the deeper meaning of forgiveness is not part of the marriage, and that same marriage faces divorce, forgiveness is rarely considered an option. Sadly, instead of embracing forgiveness as a path to healing, the act of forgiving a former spouse is mistaken as a sign of weakness, submission, and defeat. On some level, we know in our hearts what forgiveness is and how important it is, but we often find it difficult to forgive those closest to us.

Somewhere along the way, have we bought into Jennifer’s pronouncement from *Love Story* that, “Love means never having to say you’re sorry?” Is it really that simple? Was she trying to say that being in love implies that forgiveness is just assumed and that there is no need to acknowledge responsibility or remorse if you cause your partner pain? Is it okay to expect others to adjust their interpretations of what transpired, as if

they have an internal program, like Grammar Check, poised and ready to automatically clean up all our mistakes?

Sometimes the mistakes we make are small. They create little twinges of pain, misunderstanding, and sadness. Most of us are able to forgive others for such interpersonal clumsiness. But sometimes a loved one does or says something that causes more damage than a twinge of pain. For many, forgiveness is too difficult when the mistakes are great and the hurt is unbearable.

If the communication in many marriages could be likened to the workings of a computer program, many relationships would need to have entire files reformatted or deleted. The partners might freeze up and have to be rebooted. Each partner might need an antivirus program installed to protect them from every damaging word thrown their way.

Does your CIP seem to have an antivirus approach when it comes to every mistake you make, and yet is oblivious to their own mistakes? Perhaps you know people who freeze up and never let you know that you have hurt them. They just leave with little or no explanation. Others hit the control-alt-delete keys too quickly and end up holding on to things that bog down the whole system and interfere with other programs—other relationships.

Of course, there are times when we all try to forget that some things ever happened. As we should. Talking about every little hurt can turn a relationship into just one tedious problem-solving session after another. But when the mistakes mount, or the misunderstandings are too great, we need to rise above our pain. Close relationships are too special to discard so easily. To

get past these heartfelt transgressions, it is imperative that we forgive one another.

Creating a Context for Forgiveness

Any two people in a relationship, and especially in a marriage, are going to say and do things that rub each other the wrong way. Conflict is inherent in all relationships. We seem to make the biggest mistakes in our intimate relationships and it is in our intimate relationships that the errors cut the deepest. They have the most profound effect and take the longest time to understand and to transcend.

To get past these moments of conflict, couples need to create a context of forgiveness. This means that you are willing to incorporate the “allness” of the relationship. There are things you each do right, and conversely, there are things you each do wrong. If you are divorcing or considering divorce, ask yourself these two questions:

- ✧ For what do you need to be forgiven?
- ✧ For what do you need to forgive your CIP?

Forgiveness is essential for the health of divorcing couples because they often have guilt and remorse about the marriage’s failure and divorce calls attention to what went wrong. You cannot get past what went wrong until you are willing to forgive. The act of forgiving can take place in a single moment, but its benefits may extend over a lifetime because that simple act of offering forgiveness becomes a permanent part of the relationship.

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When a couple decides to separate or divorce, the concept of forgiveness is often obscured by the ego's need to be right in order to survive. (Review *Vow Two*.) Divorcing couples get caught up in the specifics of what was done or said, and they often fail to look beyond the surface situation.

Many divorcing partners either overreact or under-react to conflict, responding either with anger and hostility or with silence and escape. The other partner only remembers the hateful and attacking words that were spoken or the deadness of the response. The real context of the conflict is often left unexplored.

Too often, the mistakes that occurred during the marriage become exaggerated in the divorce process, and then it is made worse by the societal expectation that divorcing couples will be belligerent, stubborn, irrational, and selfish. These unbecoming behaviors are excused because of the prevailing attitude of, "Oh well, what do you expect? They're getting divorced." This pervasive attitude implies that getting divorced entitles anyone the right to be combative and ruthless. We have gotten to the place where we give permission to a loving, kind, well-intentioned, responsible person to go completely off their rocker. All because they are in the middle of a divorce!

This is not to say that you are not allowed to have moments of irrationality. Separation and divorce are emotionally charged events and maintaining composure is not always possible. A brief stay at an emotional triage unit at some point during the divorce process might be the right prescription. You may need to get treated for shock by getting whole units of love from sympathetic friends, some oxygen from consoling family members

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in the form of financial support, and a tourniquet in the form of wise guidance from a counselor to help stanch the bleeding of tears.

At some point, though, you need to regain your composure and dignity before the trauma of a painful divorce harms you more than you are capable of healing. And in order to expedite the healing process, you need to apply forgiveness. Forgive your CIP for his or her part, forgive yourself for your own mistakes, and forgive others who may have contributed negatively to your relationship. No physical wound ever healed without the good cells overtaking the bad cells and no emotional wound ever healed without forgiveness overtaking the pain.

For some, the separation and divorce cause so much hurt that nothing makes sense anymore. The act of getting out of bed and going through the motions of a typical day takes all the effort they can manage. They are so full of contempt and resentment that the thought of forgiving feels like alcohol being poured on an open wound. If the sting of divorce is this profound, think of forgiveness as “Spiritual Neosporin.”

Forgiveness is soothing. It lessens the pain, promotes faster healing, and even helps prevent scarring. It is the perfect medicine for emotional wounds.

What Forgiveness is Not

If we look deeper it may be that we do not resist the act of forgiveness as much as resisting what we *think* forgiveness means. So what is forgiveness? Let’s look first at what forgiveness is *not*.

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Forgiveness does not mean:

- ✧ that you stop hurting;
- ✧ that you are giving the other person permission to do again whatever you are forgiving them for;
- ✧ that you accept or tolerate the offending behavior;
- ✧ that there will not be consequences;
- ✧ that you will forget the incident ever happened; or,
- ✧ that someone has to say they are sorry first.

Forgiveness does not mean that the pain you feel is unjustified or that the pain has gone away. You are entitled to your feelings. For instance, if your CIP deceived you, you may actually *need* to feel hurt and angry. Denying or avoiding your emotional pain only buries it or channels it elsewhere.

At the same time, you cannot let painful emotions consume you either. Let the feelings and your willingness to transcend them become transforming. Let your anger and hurt tell you something about yourself. Let it tell you what is really important by telling you what makes you hurt.

Some people seem to have an enormous tolerance for emotional pain. They tolerate contemptible behavior, ignore lies and deceit, and live with feelings they should express but don't. They come across as either meek and saint-like or they are like a dormant volcano. The fire is there; they just don't let it out. Whether they are a saint or the volcano they refuse to talk about their grievances or their pain. They might have been raised in an environment where forgiveness was neither offered or expected or raised to believe that forgiveness is self-defeating and masochistic.

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But forgiveness is not masochistic. You do not expose yourself to more pain by forgiving someone. It is not a defeatist position. Forgiveness is the power of grace in action.

Forgiveness Happens in the Present Moment

Forgiveness is not surrendering to the person or the situation. It is surrendering to the “now” moment of your relationship. This now includes your personal interpretation of what happened as well as whatever you are feeling in that moment. And in that moment, you can choose to act from forgiveness.

As Eckhart Tolle points out in his book, *The Power of Now*, forgiving each present moment, instead of only offering forgiveness for just the past, gives the present moment power over the past. To forgive in the present allows each moment to become part of a past that needs no further forgiveness. This prevents a buildup of hurt feelings.

No physical wound ever healed without the good cells overtaking the bad cells and no emotional wound ever healed without forgiveness overtaking the pain.

To clarify this, let’s look at an example. Let’s say that your spouse deceived you in the past, and you are still feeling pain from what happened. In essence, you are *presently* experiencing feelings about what happened in the *past*. Like your pain, forgiveness is also a present moment experience. You cannot forgive what happened in the past until you experience forgiveness in the present. This is how forgiveness severs the hold that the past

has on you. Forgiveness is letting go *now* of wishing the past had been different.

We keep repeating patterns in our relationships, whether in the form of feelings, verbal arguments or physical behavior, because we have not fully accepted and forgiven what happened. Thus, the cycles continue, and we feel trapped in the past. Forgiveness is one means of ending the cycle, not replaying it.

When you truly forgive another or yourself, the past hurt no longer controls you. People who feel that they are a victim hold on to the past because they believe that the past is more powerful than the present. But as Tolle elaborates in his book, all true power lies in the present. The only way to heal what happened in the past is to invite the power and grace of forgiveness to come to you in the present moment.

Is Forgiving Accepting and Forgetting?

Forgiveness is not an acceptance of objectionable behavior. You can still be adamant in your dislike for whatever was done or said to you because it is something you do not want in your life either now or in the future. In other words, you can make forgiveness a part of the process of owning your feelings, setting your boundaries, and claiming your space. Acceptance in this context means to surrender to the “what is” of the situation. Remember from *Vow Three*, acceptance is not synonymous with approval.

Neither does forgiveness mean that there will be no consequences for bad behavior. The Law of Cause and Effect comes

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into play even when forgiveness is given. It is the Law of Karma, the old adage of reaping what you sow. When we hurt another, we should expect repercussions and consequences.

However, if you are the one being hurt, it does not mean that it is your job to dole out the consequences for another's actions. Life has its own timetable for payment on karmic debt. Just know that retaliation keeps the cycle going and creates debt in your own karmic column. Forgiveness ends the cycle by cleaning your slate, not theirs. It means that you have become bigger than the egregious act itself.

To err is human, to forgive divine, to forget amnesic.

Forgiveness does not mean you develop amnesia. You may never forget the pain you have endured, nor should anyone expect you to forget. Forgiving is not forgetting. Letting go is not forgetting. Forgiving does not mean that you must deny what happened, either. The memory may diminish over time until it is almost forgotten and it is just a vague shadow of a memory, but it is forever there as part of the relationship you shared. It can, however, be overcome with love, not necessarily for the person (ego) who behaved so grievously, but for the wounded soul inside that person. As Plato said, "only a hurting soul intentionally causes pain to another."

Forgiveness does not need to be requested to be given. It can be offered as an act of grace. Someone need not say they are sorry before you offer your forgiveness, but when they do show their remorse, the closure for both of you is complete. You can offer forgiveness at any time.

Some of the benefits of forgiveness can be achieved even if you do not openly forgive the other. The mere act of having forgiveness in your heart is a gift you give yourself. Forgiveness allows you to let go of the emotional weight you have been carrying around. It literally lightens your load. And when you acknowledge your forgiveness to the other person, your forgiveness then becomes a gift you give them.

Forgiveness does not care who is at fault. Forgiveness is about letting go of the burden of assigning blame and guilt, two sides of the same coin. When we assign blame to someone, we give away our power. We give away our responsibility for our own life. We mistakenly think that making another feel guilty will somehow make us feel better about ourselves. While instilling guilt can change another's behavior, it rarely changes their true feelings.

If someone felt joy and righteousness in making another feel guilty, then obviously these are the rules they have set up for the way they want to play life's game. Just know that if you use guilt this way, you will attract into your life those who also like to play by these rules. You may find yourself playing the part of the guilty party in your next relationship! Playing by these rules will keep you stuck in one of these two revolving roles. Be mindful of cycles you might be perpetuating.

The Meaning and Practice of Forgiveness

Let's take a look at our own definitions of forgiveness. When we were growing up, we were taught the general idea of forgiveness. You might have been admonished to tell your big brother

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or sister you forgave them after they said they were sorry for hitting you. They said the words, “I’m sorry,” but did you really believe them? Did they really mean it? Were they really sorry they hit you, or were they just sorry they got caught? Did you really mean it when you said you forgave them or were you just going through the motions, saying the appropriate words at appropriate times, much like an expected “please” and an obligatory “thank you”? As an adult, do you ever find yourself telling a loved one you are sorry, much like a child seeking permission to go back to playing? Isn’t it easier to just say the right words and go back and play than to stop and acknowledge how much we have hurt each other?

Maybe what has happened is that you were taught the superficial politeness of forgiveness consisting of what you are “supposed” to say. You might have been taught in Sunday school to recite, “. . . and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us . . .” and told that God forgives us for our sins. You might have learned all the right words, but forgiveness is not just about the words. It is about the opportunity to express the spark of divinity in each of us.

Jesus said, “These things I do you will do also,” and he represented God as being forgiving. If we are, indeed, created in God’s image, then isn’t it in our true nature to be forgiving too? Is it our fear of acknowledging the divinity of God inside us that prevents us from forgiving? Is our stubbornness in holding back forgiveness just a way of denying our responsibility to be all that we can be—all that God wants us to be? Forgiveness is literally God in action.

Forgiving Ourselves

If we talk about forgiveness, we must include forgiving ourselves.

- ✧ Were you taught how to forgive yourself?
- ✧ Have you forgiven yourself when you have felt remorse for mistakes you have made?
- ✧ Do you keep making the same mistakes because you failed to forgive yourself, which would allow you to move on?
- ✧ If you find it difficult to forgive yourself, does that affect how you forgive others?

Now think about your relationship with your CIP. When you make a mistake and realize that you have hurt him or her, and you say, “I’m sorry,” what do you really mean?

- ✧ Do you usually mean that you are genuinely sorry for hurting their feelings or are you just going through the motions?
- ✧ Are there times when you are afraid of saying you are sorry because you feel your CIP will neither believe you nor offer forgiveness in return?
- ✧ How does it feel when you are not forgiven? Do you feel hurt or angry?
- ✧ When you are the one doing the forgiving, do you offer the space for your CIP to feel your forgiveness, or do you make them beg?

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Of course, many circumstances and many different feelings are part of the forgiving process. Sometimes we truly are sorry that we have hurt another. At other times, we may feel that the other person is overly sensitive and we find it troublesome to have to watch everything we say and do around them.

- ✧ Does your relationship with your CIP have a forgiveness “formula”?
- ✧ Is one of you always the one who offers the olive branch, always the one who overlooks the mistake or misunderstanding?
- ✧ Has forgiveness been a missing ingredient altogether?

Forgiveness is unlimited, but that does not give us the right to abuse its graciousness. If you are easily offended and you frequently have misunderstandings with your CIP, it may be time to review your expectations of perfection for yourself and others. Let your CIP’s imperfections and communication errors simply be part of who they are—part of their humanness. You do not have to be affected by every egregious word or action that comes your way. Living with someone who is hypersensitive is like living in an emotional minefield where any false move will cause things to blow up. Be conscious of when you set up booby traps for others to trip and set off.

**Forgiveness is literally
God in action.**

When your CIP (or anyone else for that matter) errs, you have two choices: be hurt, get angry, and go straight to blame

and guilt, or be hurt, get angry, then communicate what you are feeling, and then inwardly or outwardly forgive the other person. You always have a choice in how you respond.

Not only is forgiveness good for the soul . . . it is also good for the body. Every emotion—both good and bad—is experienced and processed somewhere in the body. That means that if you do not find ways to release the emotion when you feel wronged, that emotion will find its own way to be released.

Unacknowledged or suppressed feelings of bitterness and resentment, therefore, can literally eat away at you physically. Disease (dis-ease) is often the result of unresolved emotional pain. When we close off paths to love and our connection to spiritual nourishment, forgiveness helps break the bond between our negative feelings and physical dis-ease.

When you hold on to anger toward another, especially one you have loved, and you do not take the opportunity to forgive, you pass up a chance to grow and evolve. Moreover, without being shown *how* to forgive, your children might also learn to hold onto feelings of bitterness. When their learned feelings of resentment become too painful, they may be inclined to return those feelings to their source, which is you. What have you been teaching and passing on to your children and other family members about forgiveness through your actions?

In every relationship we have a chance to be both the teacher and the student, the giver and the taker, the truster and the trustee, the lover and the loved, the forgiver and the forgiven. Our most intimate relationships are where we learn the most because they give us the greatest opportunity to experience all of who we are: all of our hopes, all of our fears, all of our talents,

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and all of our weaknesses. When the lessons get too hard, it may be time to create space and take a break. When this happens, forgive yourself for your inability to endure. Time-outs are not just for kids. Adults benefit from quiet time alone to think things through.

If you have difficulty forgiving your CIP, try forgiving yourself first for your own relationship mistakes. Do you think that God only blesses those people who stay married? God is able to forgive all because He acknowledges all. We cannot forgive what we do not first acknowledge.

Acknowledge not only who you and your CIP are, but also who you are not. For example, your CIP may be a great financial provider but emotionally unavailable. You may be a terrific homemaker but terrible at budgeting. You both may be devoted parents, but you are not best friends. You may be great sex partners, but not consoling companions.

Forgive your CIP for falling off the white horse or pedestal of your expectations of them. Then forgive yourself for putting them up there in the first place.

When you allow them to be real, just as they are, you might be able to see how to forgive them for who they are as well as for who they are not.

**Not only is forgiveness
good for the soul . . . it
is also good for the body.**

Forgiveness is powerful beyond measure, because in essence, the act of forgiving your partner brings God back to your relationship and preserves its greater purpose.

A divorce decree may dissolve a legal marriage, but if your relationship with your CIP includes forgiveness, the higher

purpose of your relationship remains intact. Forgiveness is an act of love, and love is energy. Forgiveness will bring energy back to your relationship and breathe life into what you thought was dead—not as a resurrection of the old relationship, but as a renewal of what is best in each of you that you can take with you into the future.

Is it better to be in an unforgiving marriage, or to experience an honest and forgiving divorce?

The physical and emotional space of a divorce provides a wonderful opportunity to learn lessons that you may have missed somewhere along the way. Just as you cannot hit a backspace button and retrieve emails already sent, you cannot go back and correct past mistakes in your relationships. The words have been spoken and the actions have left their mark. And just as you can send new and revised emails that include additions and corrections, you can acknowledge where you have erred, apologize for those errors, and forgive.

In summary, when you offer forgiveness, it helps you move through your pain and move on. When you forgive yourself, you give yourself the gift of growth and healing. When you make a mistake, you have a wonderful opportunity to learn from it. Don't dwell on your mistakes consumed with feelings of regret. That holds you back. Chalk them up as wonderful opportunities and lessons to be blessed. When you do this you have truly become a person who "counts their blessings."

Exercise 5: Finding Forgiveness

One reason many of us find it so hard to forgive our loved ones is that we are out of practice. We do not make it part of our consciousness to forgive every day. Here is an exercise to teach you how easy forgiveness can be and how good it can make you feel. It literally lightens your load and lifts your spirits.

By practicing little acts of forgiveness, it builds momentum. The result is that it is easier to forgive the bigger stuff when it shows up. Make forgiveness a daily habit and let the habit become a natural part of who you are.

Throughout your day, look for every possible excuse to extend forgiveness. This does not have to be outwardly or verbally expressed. Just mentally recognize the opportunity to forgive. To begin, start noticing those times when something does not go your way; and each time acknowledge it, forgive the people and circumstances, and then let it go. Think of this phrase often or when appropriate:

***Oh well, that's what's so.
Forgive it, let it be and then let it go!***

Continued on next page

Divorce Vows

Here are some fun examples to get you started. Say to yourself, “I forgive . . .

- ✧ the person in front of me who let the door slam in my face;
- ✧ the driver who cut me off in traffic;
- ✧ the dog who pooped on my lawn and the owner who didn't pick it up;
- ✧ the mail carrier who misdelivered my mail;
- ✧ my employer who didn't give me a bonus for all my hard work;
- ✧ my doctor's office for making me wait so long;
- ✧ my hairdresser who didn't have an opening on my day off;
- ✧ my cat for shedding on my clean sheets when he napped on my bed;
- ✧ my accountant for being such a stickler about receipts;
- ✧ the teenaged salesperson who gave me incorrect change;
- ✧ my child for missing the bus for the third day in a row;
- ✧ my coworker who didn't clean up after himself;
- ✧ my dog for being too curious and getting skunked;
- ✧ my congressman for being so inept;
- ✧ my friend for voting for that congressman;

Vow Five: Forgiveness

- ✧ the rap group that made profane words sound cool to my kids;
- ✧ the plumber who forgot to turn my water back on when he left; and,
- ✧ myself for forgetting to forgive.

Forgiveness is a joyful experience, so have fun with this exercise. The opportunities are endless. Live your life with forgiveness on your lips and watch the experience of your life and your relationships transform.



Divorce Vows

Notes

Vow Six



*I will be thankful for the good
that came out of our relationship.
I will not emphasize the negative aspects
of what has transpired between us.*

*Gratefulness of the present is peace.
Gratefulness of the past is wisdom.
Gratefulness of the future is faith.*

Vow Six: Gratitude

Every relationship has both positive and negative aspects—its ups and downs. Separation and divorce often prompt the participants to focus on just the downs. It is normal for the negative to get all the attention, and to some degree it is understandable.

When a couple is on the verge of divorce, they sometimes need to convince themselves that it is okay for their marriage to be over, so they focus on the problems in order to justify ending it. This negativity thrives as hurtful memories which filter into present-day thoughts, words, and behavior. A partner might even magnify their CIP's faults and negative behavior to rationalize their own bad behavior.

- ✧ Which of your CIP's faults do you focus on?
- ✧ Are those faults as bad as you make them out to be?
- ✧ If the answer is yes, then do you feed their deficiencies with behavior that instigates them? For instance, if your CIP has a short temper, do you bait them with leading words or do things that you know will set them off?
- ✧ On the other hand, is your CIP using any of your weaknesses against you and inciting you to behave in ways that make your disagreements worse?

What we dislike in others often mirrors what we do not like about ourselves or what we fear we lack. Are there things that you are overly critical of in your CIP that you are inwardly critical of in yourself? Consider whether there is any correlation between the faults you see in your CIP and your own fears and weaknesses. This is not *always* the case, but it is something to consider.

This is all about our egos—how good we are at distorting situations to validate our righteousness. The righteousness felt by both partners in divorce is sometimes just a way to justify acts of spite, revenge, and greediness in court. While not always the case, righteousness can be a by-product of forgetfulness. It's all too easy to forget our own mistakes. Remember from *Vow Two* that the ego often has a stronger need to be right than to be happy. Are you sacrificing some of your happiness and peace of mind in the name of righteousness?

Strategies for Dealing with Negative Thinking

The ego believes that it can control others through manipulation, rationalizing that this is the best way to deal with a situation it dislikes. You probably know people who are so difficult to deal with that you acquiesce to them just to stop the conflict or stop their whining.

Are you or your CIP using negative words and behavior to manipulate your divorce? Are you dwelling on all that went wrong in order to play the martyr so people will feel sorry for you? Does your CIP do this? If you answered yes to either of

Vow Six: Gratitude

these questions for yourself and if you want to stop being so negative, how do you stop the downward spiral?

Negative self-talk can be as hard to quiet and slow down as a runaway horse. It feeds off its own fears where one negative thought spooks you into another. It is often distorted and irrational and, to make matters worse, it is easier to be negative than positive when life is tough and you are in an emotionally stressful and difficult situation.

Divorce and relationships with obstinate, irrational people definitely qualify as emotionally difficult situations. During the dissolution of a relationship, the pervasive feelings of anger, hurt, and fear can scream so loudly inside that it is virtually impossible to ignore.

Here is one idea. Do not try to quiet the negative thinking, just go with it. It is often true that what we resist persists, for as long as we keep pushing against something and putting our energy into resisting it, we give it power over us. Sometimes we need to fight, to resist, what is bad. And paradoxically, sometimes resisting is the wrong approach.

If you notice yourself engaging in a negative mental tirade and resisting whatever it is in your life or relationship that you do not like, pause and take a deep breath. Then let the negative thoughts continue, but this time, become an objective observer. Listen to the melodramatic thoughts running through your mind and experience them as you would if you were listening to a radio soap opera program. Better yet, become the radio, the vehicle that broadcasts the story. Let the words run through you in the same way that words play through a radio. And like a radio, do

**Are you sacrificing
some of your happiness
and peace of mind
in the name of
righteousness?**

not hold onto the words; just let them pass right through you.

In *Vow Three*, we talked about consciously tuning in to receive some of your intuition.

But sometimes we are unconsciously a player in the soap

opera *Days of Our Lives*. So give in, but be the audience instead of the actor. When you separate yourself from your story, you gain a different perspective because you have tuned in to a higher expression of who you are. You actually are much greater than your life's circumstances, your life's story. By stepping back and observing, you will see that you are greater than the sum of your parts!

***You have negative thoughts, but you are not
your negative thoughts. You may be in
a negative situation, but you are not your situation.***

Here is another strategy to help shift your thinking. Every time you think of a negative facet of the relationship that is ending, challenge yourself to think about something positive that was a direct result of that relationship. When you do this, you make the choice to be the scriptwriter as well as the audience. You are now in charge of creating your own experience.

Another way to shift your perspective is by asking questions and directing your thinking of where you want it to go. One question you could ask might be: "Did I learn something valuable about myself from this relationship?"

Vow Six: Gratitude

For example, if your CIP found it difficult to keep a job and you were constantly without enough money, what feelings did the subject of money and the lack of employment trigger for you?

- ✧ *Fear* of not being able to afford basic necessities?
- ✧ *Embarrassment* because you had to ask others for help?
- ✧ *Resentment* because you had to take a greater share of responsibility for supporting the family?
- ✧ *Anger* because you could not buy something you wanted?
- ✧ *Hurt* because you lost trust in your partner's ability to hold up to their end of the financial burden?
- ✧ *Sadness* because you lost some respect for him or her?

Think about what emotion was the dominant force in how you reacted to your CIP's behavior. Your answer might tell you a lot about what is important to you in a relationship. This kind of introspection helps you get to know your priorities and, therefore, make wiser choices in the future. It is hard to get what you want in life until you know what you don't want, as well as what you do want.

Do not belittle yourself for negative thinking. Relationship, family, job, health and other more global types of issues can dominate our thinking and cause us to be overcome with worry and concern. Negative thinking can consume enormous amounts of energy. All of us battle the negative gremlins that can take up residence in our head.

Fortunately, you need not be a "victim" of negative thinking. As a human, you have two capacities that can be used to

counteract it: free will and the capacity to be self-reflective. Free will is the key to our lives. Our free will gives us the power to choose. It also gives us the power to be self-reflective. Not only do we get to choose, we actually have the capacity to know that we get to choose. Therefore, we can choose gratefulness over being thankless; honor over disrespect; sincerity over hypocrisy. These are all aspects of choosing to concentrate on positive, character-building thoughts and not dwelling on negative, self-degrading ones. Whatever gets your attention will get your energy. What gets your energy is what you will produce.

Ask yourself what conflicts in your relationship consume the most energy. Negative thinking feeds negativity. Constant negativity will turn a relationship that seemed sour and bitter into something that has become poisonous and deadly—one that could kill your ability to create loving, nurturing relationships in the future.

This does not mean that you should ignore or deny all the negative aspects of your relationship, especially if it was dysfunctional, or disregard the stress of getting divorced. You have to be willing to look at what went wrong squarely in the face but realize that by *constantly* harping on what went wrong and what was lacking, you will have no energy to make it better or to create a healthier relationship with someone new.

The Glass is Half Full

Relationships going through a divorce often suffer from scarcity issues. Most divorces happen because the partners feel there is not enough of something: love, respect, communication, sex,

Vow Six: Gratitude

commitment, trust, etc. These thoughts of scarcity only lead to more scarcity. Thoughts of scarcity not only come from looking at the glass half empty, but also come from not acknowledging that the glass is half full.

Seeing the glass half full may be asking more than you are able to do just now, especially if you are right in the thick of the divorce process. Perhaps your relationship has become so troubling that you cannot see beyond it right now. If so, start with just *knowing* that the glass is half full even if you cannot see it right now. From that place of knowing, then slowly start with the obvious.

For instance, if you have children, then remind yourself and them too, that they are the “good” that came out of your relationship. Your children would not be in your life without your CIP. Other things you could acknowledge are the fact that you have a roof over your head, food on the table, and some money in the bank. Do you have insurance or a retirement account? Do you have a support system of family and friends to lean on?

Once you have acknowledged the basic elements in your life you can then move on to recognizing more major accomplishments or challenges you have overcome together, such as: starting a business, completing your degrees, or building a home. Perhaps you now have a close friend you met through your relationship or you got a job or a career because of your relationship. Maybe you were able to go on a memorable trip or had other life-changing experiences. None of these things would have happened without the relationship you had with your CIP.

Whatever gets your attention will get your energy. What gets your energy is what you will produce.

It is okay to acknowledge these achievements and, at the same time, still have negative feelings and doubts about the relationship. Remember, *the glass is half full and half empty at the same time.*

Too many people exit from one relationship so consumed by their bad experiences that they bring that negativity into their next relationship. That is one of the reasons second marriages fail at an even higher rate than first marriages. Focus on where you want to go. Acknowledge where you have been but quit looking in the rearview mirror. Use your experiences as a source of wisdom and insight that will help you make smarter and healthier choices in the future. You cannot walk toward something new and better if you are looking back, focusing on something old and broken.

Helping Children See the Positive

It is vitally important for parents to see their children in a positive light even if they fail to see the marriage that way. If you try too hard to convince your children that it is best that you divorce their mother or father and then give them a laundry list of all the negatives about the relationship, they just might include themselves in that list unless you specifically show and tell them otherwise. They need to learn that good things can come out of bad experiences. There are no relationships with zero value. Few things in life are all good or all bad. Life is a

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mixed bag. What we keep and pack to take with us is up to us. No one packs this bag for us.

Teach your children to carry with them their most positive experiences, and keep reinforcing the fact that they have been the most important positive experience within your marriage. Help them understand that they are alive for a reason, and you will always be there to help them discover that purpose.

Your children need to feel that you see them as valuable contributions to the world. More than anything, they need to feel your love and appreciation. It is important for them to feel wanted and special. When you overly criticize your marriage or their mom or dad, they may take on that negative energy. They may get sucked into your negative talk and unconsciously lump themselves into the justification for the breakup.

Children often do not completely understand why their parents are divorcing because they are not mature enough to understand the complexities of marital relationships. Most children need the wisdom that comes from life experience and their own intimate relationships to finally come to terms with their parents' divorce—if they ever really do.

Even adult children have an emotionally difficult time if their parents divorce. For them, it can be even more unsettling because they have many more years invested in the stability and validity of their parents' relationship. Adult children whose parents divorce can begin to think it was all just a lie, not just their parents' marriage, but the parents themselves. If they are married they might start to doubt their own marriage or compare their marriage to their parents!

Regardless of the age, children are left primarily to their own mental resources for coping and dealing with your decision. They need all the kudos and positive encouragement you can give them, no matter their age.

Writing as a Tool

Another way to cope with negative thinking is to write down your thoughts. Putting them on paper removes them from your head. It takes a lot of mental energy to keep all of your thoughts penned up inside. As you replay the same negative thoughts about the past over and over again, you create more negative feelings in the present. Like mold in the dark, those negative thoughts will grow and multiply, often feeding a misguided sense of personal righteousness that perpetuates the negativity.

You may be thinking that writing your thoughts down sounds like a suggestion to journal or keep a diary. Some people dislike the idea of journaling because they see it as narcissistic, a waste of time, too revealing, and something that is only done by really needy people. Actually, all of this is true. Journaling is a very self-absorbed activity. It can seem like a waste of time. It is very revealing, and really needy people journal.

But journaling is also a powerful strategy to help you shift your perspective and get you through a difficult period in your life. There are times when it might be necessary to be a little self-serving.

To make you feel more comfortable with the idea, you need to know that this kind of journaling is not meant to be a day-to-day description of what you did or a series of contrived,

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orchestrated statements of your thoughts or feelings. It could be, if that seems helpful for you. Journaling can also be a simple record of your random thoughts as you sit with paper and pen in hand. Merely sit and write literally whatever comes into your mind. It is your stream of consciousness at the moment, whether it is positive, negative or even mundane.

You cannot walk toward something new and better if you are looking back, focusing on something old and broken.

You could also journal your thoughts with more intention and purpose. Write down a question that keeps you up at night and ask your higher self for its answer. Give your innate wisdom a channel and see what comes out. This is a time for soul searching and a journal is a record of your findings.

There may be times when nothing you write makes any sense or is worth reading, sharing, or reflecting on. But even then, the simple act of writing clears out mental space for profound things to emerge. It is like cleaning out your disk space and defragmenting your head much like defragmenting our computers. It gets out all the petty garbage and superficial stuff, creating room for important things to surface.

You could also think of these moments of writing as ice-breaking chitchat with your higher self. For instance, you have probably had some really amazing conversations with someone that took place only after an initial exchange about the weather or some other boring topic. However, you stayed engaged with that person long enough for a really interesting topic to unfold and from this conversation you discovered what a remarkable

person he or she was or you learned something fascinating. So stick with the seemingly “waste of time” experiences and continue the flow of writing, continue to write out your questions and see what comes out.

Wisdom is inside all of us (*Review Vow Three*). Sometimes all we need to do is to create avenues for it to reveal itself. Do not discount your own natural ability to answer the questions that your life and your relationships have presented to you. Challenge your higher self to surprise you. You have no idea what treasures you have beneath the surface until you start digging.

If you believe this writing exercise might be too revealing, you are right. That resistance you feel to journaling is in itself revealing. What hidden thoughts do you have that you do not want to confront? Are you afraid you have a dark side? Here is a little secret. We all have dark thoughts rattling around in us—all those hidden things about ourselves that we are afraid to show—such as things we fear, things we hate, things we want to change, and things we are embarrassed about ourselves. By uncovering these buried thoughts, you might discover some of your hidden issues. When you bring these issues to the surface, you are in a much better position to heal them.

Even the silly, ongoing, annoying behavior that drives you nuts is rarely just about the disagreeable behavior. It is not about the dirty socks left on the floor. It is not about the cap left off the toothpaste. There is always something deeper. When you write down your free-flowing thoughts, you may discover certain things about yourself that will help you understand some of your “whys”—why you get so upset when he does this; why you get so angry when she says that.

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Journaling is helpful to people who are really needy . . . and that includes you. For goodness sakes, you are going through a divorce (are thinking of divorcing, or have already gone through one), and you are still struggling. You would not be reading this if you weren't! Being needy is part of the human experience. From the time we are born we have needs. We need love, food, play, work, money, sex, no sex, exercise, sleep, togetherness, private time, something to do, time to do nothing, and so on.

Throughout your life, your ego has created an endless list of needs in order to survive. Divorce is a time when those needs are heightened. Learning about what you are really thinking and feeling will help you determine what your ego has convinced you it needs. By doing so you might also clarify how these needs have been controlling your life.

Your spiritual side has needs too. You can feel your spirit's needs in the pit of your stomach, that constant need to sigh, that feeling of being off balance or of not being whole. Listen to your body and write down what you hear through your feelings. Your spirit is crying out for attention. Take the time to find out what your spirit needs. Does it need to feel more acceptance, or joy, or forgiveness? Issues in our lives and our relationships often bring to light not just our egos' needs, but our spirits' needs as well. Be willing to recognize and confront your issues. When issues are brought to the surface, you have an opportunity to work on them.

When you journal and then reflect on what you have uncovered, it creates the space for a shift in your perspective. From this new perspective, you are better able to see the positive

elements in your relationship, which then paves the way to feelings of gratitude for them.

An Attitude of Gratitude

Life does not always make gratitude an easy proposition. You may have to work to develop this “attitude of gratitude.” Divorce can feel like a disaster, like an unforeseen storm that comes through your life, picking up everyone and everything you love, twisting them around and hurling them back at you, smashing them into a zillion pieces. Then you are left to live in the debris while you try to put things back together and make sense of it all. You might wonder how you can feel gratitude at such a time.

First, recognize the state you are in at the time. Gratitude does not happen in the past or the future. It is a present-moment experience. Set aside time every day to allow your feelings to come out. Use this time to face whatever emotion you need to feel. This might mean that you need to give yourself the space to be distraught or completely overwhelmed. Allow yourself to lose it with a good cry in the shower or an old-fashioned pillow scream. Sometimes losing it is the only way we can get the crazies out of us so we can feel sane. It might be a good time to meditate and journal your feelings, recording the specifics of what you are feeling—what monopolizes your thinking.

Here’s an easy journaling assignment.

- ✧ Take ten minutes in the morning to think positive thoughts and exactly what it is that you want to focus on that day. Write them down.

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- ✧ Take ten minutes in the evening to go over the thoughts that demanded your energy that day. Write those down.
- ✧ Compare the two lists. How good were you at giving your positive thoughts your energy?

You could also take a more physical route and purge your feelings through exercise. Go for a walk or run. Go to the gym or a kickboxing, yoga, or tai chi class. Take a dance class or music lessons. Listen to soothing or uplifting music. Go out in nature and take in all that is right about the world. There is beauty and harmony all around us. Make a point of finding it and bringing it into your life.

Realizing the positive is like flipping a switch or striking a match. One little match can light one candle that can then lead you through total darkness. This candle is your gratitude shining its light and blazing a path. From this single flame you can light other candles, one grateful thought at a time, to illuminate your way. It is up to you to figure out what each light represents for you and what it is that you are most grateful for in your relationship and in your life. Everyone's positive light is unique. It may take effort, but there is always that flip side. Just as you must first go into and past the *empty* space to reach the *occupied* space of the glass that is half full, if you are willing, you can go beyond your emptiness and find something to be thankful for.

You have seen news stories about natural disasters and other catastrophic events in which survivors have expressed gratitude and have maintained positive outlooks, even in the face of losing everything they own. For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane

Katrina, many evacuees were thankful that their family members survived and that their pets were rescued. They were also grateful for the outpouring of love and support from people thousands of miles away.

Jean-Baptiste Karr, nineteenth-century critic and novelist, was said to comment that, "Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses." Like Karr, people who survive and overcome terrible events recognize the importance of gratitude in helping them cope with their circumstances. It is gratitude in the midst of great loss that helps us move forward with our lives. Separation and divorce of an intimate relationship can feel like an emotional disaster in your life. Do not dismiss how gratitude can strengthen your spirit at a time when you are most fragile and need it the most.

For the sake of your overall emotional and physical health it is imperative during the stress of the divorce process and the post-divorce period that you find things to be grateful for. A thankful heart is a better place from which to solve problems, create happiness, achieve health, come to acceptance, and live your life. Like forgiveness, gratitude has a magical way of comforting the hurting soul.

The Thank You Prayer

Just as you needed to take baby steps to acknowledge the positive aspects of your relationship, you might need to start with easy things to be grateful for. Gratitude starts with a positive thought and then adds a blessing to it.

Vow Six: Gratitude

Gratitude includes not simply acknowledging the positive, but being truly thankful for it and holding it as a blessing. Your first thoughts of gratitude might need to be about insignificant things. For instance, you might be thankful that it is a beautiful, sun shiny day, perfect for a walk or picnic in the park. Or you could be thankful that it is raining and you need not bother to water the lawn. You could be thankful that you were able to give your children a hug and a kiss as they went off to school, or you could be thankful that the kids are at their mom's or dad's house which allows you to sleep in on your day off.

Find something to be thankful for at the end of each day. Say a simple "thank-you prayer" in bed every night as you quiet your mind for sleep. Write these thank-you prayers in your journal and periodically review them when you feel depressed and low on energy. Use the "glass half full" philosophy to either end your day by counting your blessings or by jumpstarting your day on a positive note.

There is also joy and humor out there for you to embrace, so give yourself permission to be joyful and laugh out loud. Joy is God's way of smiling at himself and laughter is your spirit's way of acknowledging His humorous side. Laughter is also one of the best holistic medicines because when you laugh, you release endorphins throughout your whole body. Instantly, your body feels connected to joy. Sometimes one good belly laugh can literally break the grip that darkness has over you. There is a kind of salvation in finding ways to laugh through our tears. Just as there is always something to be thankful for, there is always something that can bring us to laughter.

Gratitude starts with a positive thought and then adds a blessing to it.

What makes a divorce so difficult to deal with are all the negative ingredients that are part of it. There are countless areas of disagreement, hurt feelings, anger, and emotional upheaval.

At times you might feel like negative emotion is all you have. Nothing could be further from the truth. You have the ability and the freedom, whether you choose to exercise it or not, to find the positive qualities, achievements, and memories from your relationship that have helped you be the person you are. Denying the positive only reinforces the downward spiral you may be experiencing.

You must look up and head in the direction you want to go. Your destination will always be determined by the direction you are facing. Use the positive aspects of your marriage—what you did right, what you achieved, what you learned and how far you have come—as a springboard to launch you towards healthier, more fulfilling relationships in the future. As often as you can, think of what was good and positive about your relationship and recognize those things as the blessings they are. When you do this, you will be inspired to create more blessings for yourself in your future. Bless where you are, all that you have become, and all that you are becoming.

When you bless your journey you become the blessing.

Exercise 6: For the Better

Marriage vows often include the words “for better or worse.” In this exercise, you are asked to write in your journal something that your CIP taught you or a way in which he or she influenced you that made you a better person and enhanced your life. Complete the following sentence: I am a better person because (your CIP’s name) _____ taught (inspired, encouraged, introduced, etc) me _____ .

Now think of something that you taught your CIP, or a way in which you influenced your CIP that you think made him or her a better person. Complete this sentence: _____ (your CIP’s name) is a better person because I taught (inspired, encouraged, introduced, etc.) them _____ .

There is always something to be thankful for. We just need to be willing to take the time to look for the blessings (lessons) that life hides among the thorns. It is okay to be thankful for parts of your marriage or relationship even though you want a divorce because the relationship, as a whole, does not work and is not for your highest good. Closure comes when you accept the totality of the relationship, when you are grateful for it all.



Divorce Vows

Notes

Vow Seven



*I will promote a positive environment that
will support a new relationship.*

I will not keep company with disparaging people.

We become the company we keep.

Vow Seven: Positive Environment

It is true that we do become the company we keep and it is never more so than during the emotionally volatile times that define divorce and the post-divorce period. Choosing your company and your environmental support system are some of the most important decisions you will make as you process through the separation and legal termination of a marriage. All of us are affected by our environment, both positively and negatively, but when we deal with the stress of a divorce, it is more important than ever to be conscious of how we are influenced by it.

One of the ways our environment affects us is through validation. It is normal to seek validation. This is a survival response which arises out of the needs of the ego. When you deal with the drama of your life—that is, the conflict between your desires and your fears—your ego screams out for even greater attention. Our egos naturally gravitate to people who can either calm our fears or tell us we can get what we desire. During your divorce process, be wary of whom your ego is drawn to.

To lessen the ego's impact you need the assistance of your spiritual side. Your spiritual side will be the part of you which will help you create that positive and healing environment you need. Your spiritual side only desires peace, a simple destination, but the road there can be an environmental obstacle course, complete with an abundance of challenges.

Peace is not the ego's goal, survival is. And survival is not synonymous with peace. There are many people who survive a

divorce, yet never feel at peace. Peace may begin with having a peaceful heart but it needs a nurturing environment to be sustained.

One way to illustrate why the premise of *Vow Seven* is so important is to understand how the body's immune system reacts to and is affected by its environment. During emotionally or physically stressful times, the immune system is in a weakened state. If you are exposed to a virus during such a time, you are much more likely to get sick, either during the crisis or immediately afterwards. Therefore, it is wise to avoid people who are sick (physically or emotionally) when you yourself are feeling run down and/or emotionally drained from your divorce.

Our emotional well-being is no different than our physical well-being. We must pay attention to our surroundings.

Your Support System

Much of your life is determined, not just influenced, by your relationships and your relationships do not live in isolation. They exist within the context of your environment. To illustrate the point, it is difficult—if not impossible—to have a quiet, intimate conversation with someone in a room full of arguing people. Any achievement is not done in isolation. It may require intention, determination and perseverance on an individual level, but there is always an interaction with the environment.

To achieve a peaceful and amicable divorce or post-divorce relationship, you must be surrounded by an environment—family, friends, advisors—supportive of that goal. Recognize that you cannot do this alone. How has your environment influenced

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your situation thus far? Has your environment been supportive of peace and harmony or has it been promoting conflict and discord? Look closely at what you are experiencing or feeling

Peace is not the ego's goal, survival is. And survival is not synonymous with peace.

such as peace or conflict and see if you can determine if it is the result of the environment you are surrounding yourself with.

For starters, you need to be most mindful of the people with whom you associate. Avoid sharing the personal details of your relationship with people who want to feed off your misery perhaps just for the sake of justifying their own misguided and unbecoming behavior. For instance, your best friend may know you inside and out and you may trust her with your life. However, if she has gone through an unpleasant divorce or is currently mishandling a struggling relationship, she probably is not the best person to seek advice from during your own separation and divorce.

Do you surround yourself with people who have had troubled relationships or do you seek out people who are in positive and loving relationships? It is not in your best interests to associate with people who only validate your negative feelings, even if it does feel good at the time. In the recovery movement, people who continue to support problematic behavior like an addiction are called enablers. Are there people in your support system who are enabling or encouraging you to stay stuck in negative thinking and instigating unreasonable, even revengeful behavior? There is an old Chinese Proverb that says, "If you're going to seek revenge, you'd better dig two graves." Revenge is a lose/lose

If you're going to seek revenge, you'd better dig two graves.

proposition. Is that who you really want to be?

Another way that your support system can hurt you is by feeding your mind with un-

necessary speculation that can then send your mind spiraling out of control with fear and conjecture. Incendiary comments made by loved ones frequently are based not on the truth but come strictly from their own biases. Loved ones mean well and even feel they are supporting you when they give you warnings and advice. Unfortunately, one off-the-wall, fear-ridden comment is all it takes to start the downward spiral of negative thinking. There are times when you need to let the negativity run its course (as explained in *Vow Six*), and there are times when you need to “get off the train.”

To help you do this, avoid being around revenge-minded people, even if they love you. If you cannot avoid them altogether then ask them not to make unnecessary, spite-inducing comments. Once negative suppositions take over your thinking and gain power and energy, they can be difficult to slow down. Try to quickly recognize when you have been encouraged to focus your energy on the negative, and then take steps to shift that focus. Hurtful feelings lead easily to revenge and if you do not take back control, the impetus might provoke you to say or do things you will regret. If you make a conscious effort to surround yourself with positive and uplifting support, it will help you maintain control over your emotions.

Do not just avoid people who are toxic; purposely seek out people who engender positive support. Learning how to shift

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your focus to the positive is like replacing any bad habit with a good one. You must first create an environment that helps you succeed. If someone is trying to lose weight, they go to a weight loss support group and surround themselves with like-minded people with similar goals. They do not go to a restaurant with an all-you-can-eat buffet.

Balance is what you are trying to achieve. Reach out for different kinds of love for different stages of the process. Try to find a balance of empathetic and supportive people who will give you a well-rounded perspective that is fundamentally positive. “Pity parties” turn into pity patterns that are hard to break. If you live in an unhealthy environment too long, you are bound to be influenced in ways that are not for your higher good.

Of course, there will be times when you just need to vent, rant, cry, and have someone listen to you with a sympathetic ear. But after you have had your meltdown, you also need someone who will say, “Now that you have gotten that out of your system, are you ready to move forward?” Be around people who are emotionally sympathetic and supportive, but who will also give you the tough love you really need when you need it. Tough love is like a deep massage that kneads the tightness and toxins out of a painful muscle. It hurts but at the same time, it actually feels good and is good for us.

The most comforting and encouraging support system many of us have is our immediate family. It is wonderful when you have an empathetic family and they are able to offer a shoulder to cry on. Sometimes a good cry and an “It’ll be okay, baby” is just what you need to hear from Mom. However, if all Mom is going to say is, “You poor thing,” you will need others in your support system.

“You poor thing” may be the right medicine in the beginning, but if she cannot shift her support to a more “get your chin up off the floor” kind of love, then her supportive attempts will leave you a powerless victim.

What is Coloring You?

Here is a very simple experiment from a preschool class that even a four-year-old child can understand to help illustrate *Vow Seven*.

A teacher takes a white carnation and puts it in a glass of water, to which she adds a few drops of red food coloring. When the children return to class the next day they find that the carnation is no longer white. The petals have turned pink as the carnation has drawn up the red food coloring in the water through its root system. What a terrific visual lesson to learn at any age. Like that carnation, you can inadvertently alter your colors by allowing yourself to take in unhealthy thoughts and ideas from your surroundings.

It is important to be aware of the *things* in your environment, not just the people. For instance, what books or magazines do you read? What kind of movies and television shows do you watch? What kind of music do you listen to? Realize that if you watch hours of soap operas and TV dramas, you are more likely to perpetuate and fuel your own dramas. If you read trashy gossip tabloids, you might find yourself the topic of other’s trashy gossip. If you listen to music with depressing, hateful words, you might end up incorporating that verbiage into your own speech. If you read magazine articles with themes such as “don’t get mad, get even,” all you will probably get is an even higher attorney bill. If

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you surround yourself with an environment that keeps egging you on to just “give ‘em hell,” you are just as likely to get hell right back.

In the South, there is an apt, old proverb: *If you dig in crap you end up with it all over you.* Review what you watch, read, and hear. What part of your environment might you need to detoxify?

Your Attorney and the Legal Process

In addition to your immediate friends and family, your attorney will most likely be one of your greatest influences. Seek out an attorney who empathizes with your goal of a peaceful resolution. Your attorney should not only look after your basic legal rights, but have the capacity to take a more holistic approach. Just because we have a “right” to something does not mean it would be best if we got it.

Seek out an attorney who will help you settle your financial matters fairly and who will do so by encouraging you to behave rationally and with integrity. When you can work with a legal advisor who believes in victory through integrity, you will have a much easier time maintaining your own integrity. In the end, you will have the emotional strength to face the world on your own because your integrity and self-respect were not sacrificed in the process. Do not put yourself in the position of explaining to a future potential partner how you really are a loving, kind, compassionate person who once took your former spouse to “the cleaners.”

This does not mean you should be a doormat during or after your divorce. Have a sense of victory in the end, if you wish.

Tough love is like a deep massage that kneads the tightness and toxins out of a painful muscle.

Stand up to your CIP and know how to protect your legal as well as your emotional boundaries. But take a martial arts approach to conflict. The martial arts approach to conflict is to leverage your opponent's energy to your

advantage. When they attack, you deflect their force past you, using their own momentum in your favor.

Leverage always works best when it has a strong, balanced foundation. Strive to make legal choices from a position of moral strength and use your legal leverage wisely and only when necessary for protection or for what is equitable. Once you have determined what is fair and just, then be strong and do not back down.

Legal Options

There are several different routes to choose from to obtain a divorce and navigate through the legal environment. There is the customary two-attorney system, mediation, and a relatively new way to solve legal issues called collaborative law. If the *Divorce Vows* philosophy seems to resonate with you and your CIP, then mediation or the collaborative law approach might be worth investigating.

If you are just starting the process and the two of you are still on fairly good terms, then mediation is definitely worth a try. You can always opt out and try the collaborative law approach or go the traditional divorce court route if mediation

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does not work. Mediation is also applicable to couples who are post-divorce and have old unresolved issues or new ones to deal with. Time is a great healer and with time comes experience—which is one of our sources for wisdom. Give your wise, older and more experienced self a chance at the problems.

In general, mediators work toward a goal that respects both parties' needs. A mediator must stay neutral and unbiased, which means for some couples and some problems they can be the perfect person to guide them to a satisfactory resolution. A mediator's practice incorporates the qualities of civility, openness and negotiation. It does not involve coercion, threats, or manipulation. If you feel that mediation is not an option for you given your CIP's attitude, or yours for that matter, a mediator could still be a good resource for legal referrals. Mediators frequently network with attorneys who take a less adversarial approach. (To find out more about mediation go to <http://www.mediate.com/>.)

Some attorneys who have decided to practice law with a less adversarial approach have become “collaborative law” attorneys. Collaborative law is a relatively new field that approaches the legal process as a team concept. This approach to legal conflict began in Minnesota in the early 1990s and has since become accepted in most states and several different countries. Collaborative law attorneys have the legal background necessary to know how to protect the legal rights of their clients, as well as experience in negotiation and conflict resolution through a team problem-solving approach. (To find out more about collaborative law go to <http://www.collaborativepractice.com/>.)

To help you decide between mediation and collaborative law, here are a few of the main characteristics of both to consider.

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Mediation and collaborative law are based upon a win/win outcome. The objective is to get both parties involved in the divorce process, since it is the couple's lives that are being affected, not the lives of the attorney or the mediator. A divorce that is settled through collaborative law or mediation is typically less costly than traditional litigation, much more flexible, and frequently more satisfying for the participants since it is the couple, themselves, who maintain control of the process.

The primary difference between mediation and collaborative law is the presence of legal representation. Typically in mediation, the mediator acts as a neutral party and steers the couple through the divorce process with skilled questioning and fact-finding techniques. The mediator guides the discussions until both parties can agree on the outcome of each issue. The mediator does not offer any legal advice, although, attorneys for both parties can attend mediation meetings to assure that legal rights are being addressed and protected.

A collaborative law divorce, on the other hand, involves two trained collaborative law attorneys and their respective clients. Usually, each attorney meets individually with his or her client once or twice. In these meetings, the client and attorney have the opportunity to review a personal checklist and discuss all the aspects of the situation, including but not limited to financial matters, children, and the client's personal needs, goals and concerns.

Once these meetings have taken place, all four parties meet to discuss each specific issue. Needs and concerns are openly expressed. Problem solving is approached as a team

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effort. Open communication is encouraged through questions, and honesty is the cornerstone of the process. Destructive and demeaning statements are specifically not allowed. All considerations are encouraged in the discussion as a means to identify hidden, underlying issues.

By going beyond the surface of a particular issue, couples often settle their problems at a deeper, more permanent level. Matters are not resolved until both parties can agree to a decision—the win/win concept. Once both parties have reached a mutual agreement on all concerns, the attorneys draw up final documents, which are then presented to a judge who signs off on the divorce and the divorce decree is granted.

The collaborative law process follows a few basic ground rules:

1. Neither party is coerced into signing off on a concern. Both parties need to be satisfied with the decision.
2. Threatening to go to court is not allowed.
3. If the collaborative process breaks off due to an impasse, both attorneys agree not to represent their clients in litigation.
4. Only one professional person from each of a variety of possible categories is used, such as a Realtor, tax accountant, child psychologist, etc. This avoids the “us vs. them” mentality.
5. All costs incurred during the deliberations are shared equally or incorporated as part of the negotiations.

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Even though mediation and collaborative law are terrific options, these alternatives are not for every divorcing couple. Either approach takes work on the part of the participants and requires both parties to see the value in the give-and-take approach. The parties need to be able to avoid the power struggles that so often dominate divorce proceedings. They require a willingness to see the big picture, and not just the nitpicky details. They require the ability to see that the other party's best interests can become their own best interests in the long run. They require the willingness to let go of getting your own way all the time. They take someone who is willing to put aside personal anger, pain, and bitterness in order to make wise, rational decisions, not decisions based strictly on raw emotion.

If either the collaborative law or mediation approach sounds like something you might like to try, get referrals for a mediator or collaborative law attorney in your area. If you cannot yet imagine these alternative approaches working for you, give yourself some time with the *Divorce Vows* and revisit the decision later. In time you and your CIP might open up to the idea. Even if you decide to take a more traditional legal route, use the *Vows* to make the divorce process more civil.

Collaborative law or mediation takes work, sometimes a lot of work. But this is an investment in your life. These processes do not make decisions for you. You make the decisions when drafting your divorce decree, a document that will determine a lot about how your life will look after the ink dries. You are the ones who will have to live with these decisions. The mediator/attorney/judge has little investment in your future

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other than receiving payment and the personal satisfaction of providing a valuable service.

A relationship is determined by the attitudes and efforts of the participants. Your divorce process and your post-divorce relationship will be a reflection of your attitude too. No matter what approach you choose when dealing with your legal issues, in summary here are a few basic guidelines regarding your environment:

- ✧ Choose your support system wisely. Share your situation with people who can remain relatively neutral and who will offer empathy, concern, and affirming support.
- ✧ Surround yourself with a positive environment that will nurture you through these stressful times. This includes books, movies, music and other sources of support and inspiration in your daily life.
- ✧ Find a positive divorced relationship to use as a role model or ask non-confrontational people for a reference when choosing an attorney.
- ✧ Ask them how they achieved this relationship. Find out what they would have done differently and what you can learn from their experience and mistakes.

Like all the other *Vows*, this is not an all-or-nothing proposition. These suggestions are merely goals to strive toward, things to think about, and strategies to consider. Even though a

A relationship is determined by the attitudes and efforts of the participants.

less adversarial approach may seem idealistic, do not categorize it as unrealistic. If you have a very contentious relationship with your CIP and your CIP is difficult, angry and vindictive,

you have all the more reason to surround yourself with positive people promoting positive solutions.

Be proud to become the company you keep.

Exercise 7: Chicken Soup for the Bowl

This is a simple cooking exercise designed to show you how important our choices are and how our environment affects the outcome.

Take a whole chicken, put it in a large pot, cover it with cold water and add ½ tablespoon of salt. Place the pot on the stove and turn the heat to high. Set an empty soup bowl next to the stove. When the water starts to boil, turn the heat to medium-high and notice the fatty foam that has appeared. Would you want to eat this foam? Probably not. So with a small ladle skim off the foam and discard it into the empty soup bowl. When no more foam seems to appear, reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer.

Next, clean and cut up plenty of your favorite vegetables (we add an onion, carrots and celery with a small can of tomato sauce and a can of stewed tomatoes) and choose seasonings to your liking (our favorites are Italian seasoning, pepper, chicken-base paste and parsley) and add those to the soup as well. As time passes, fat will rise to the top that needs to be skimmed off. Be careful not to skim away some of the seasoning that gets mixed in with the risen fat.

Cook for about two hours or until the chicken falls easily off the bone. Turn the stove off. Remove the chicken

Continued on next page

and put it in a large separate bowl to cool. After the chicken has cooled, strip the meat off the bones and tear them into bite-sized pieces. As the soup cools more fat will appear on the surface to skim. Put the chicken pieces back in the soup and return the soup to a simmer. Dump the chicken bones and skin in the trash and flush the discarded fat down the toilet or pour it down the drain along with hot running water. (You don't want that fat in your pipes either.) Clean the bowl with soap and warm water and set a place to eat. It is now soup time.

As you eat your soup, think about the healthy and positive ingredients that went into creating this wonderful meal. Also, think about what was removed. You had to get the pot hot enough for some of the unhealthy parts to rise so you could see them and skim them away. You had to let things cool off before you could handle them. You got to choose the ingredients to your liking. You also had to discard the inedible parts (which actually contributed to the flavor immensely) and clean the bowl before you could eat.

This pot of soup could represent many things. It could represent your life in general or just a portion of it, like your marriage, your job or career, or another important relationship. The point is that a lot of positive, healthy ingredients need to go into your pots. Conversely, there are some things that you need to recognize that should be

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skimmed off and thrown away after they have served their purpose. There needs to be a certain amount of heat or conflict in order for you to experience some things which transform you for the better. It also takes time for all the seasonings and ingredients to be absorbed in order for your life to become rich with flavor. Periods of cooling off are necessary and valuable as well and you mustn't forget to clean your mess.

We have a greater success of creating healthy, tasty soups in our lives when we notice what we are putting in and taking out of our pots. Life is like cooking a big pot of soup, much of it is of our own choosing. Find a recipe you like and get cookin'.



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Notes

Vow Eight



*I will be a constructive participant
when I interact with you.*

I will not engage in destructive behavior.

*To build a good relationship
it helps if our spirit is the master designer
and our ego is just the foreman.*

Vow Six discussed the need to be thankful and to have a positive perspective about your relationship. *Vow Seven* addressed the importance of having a supportive environment. *Vow Eight* puts those two into action. It encourages you to be more constructive by searching for the true source of the problem when you are in conflict with your CIP. If you are unable or unwilling to do that, *Vow Eight* suggests that you at least minimize your destructive tendencies.

The dictionary defines constructive as “helping to improve.” It also contains the base word “construct,” which means “to build or to make.” A “constructive participant” here refers to being more than someone who has the intention of building or making something better than it was before. It refers to actually putting that intent into practice.

While redefining your relationship and renegotiating your roles, you have the opportunity to improve on what you had in the past by building toward a better relationship with your CIP in the future. You also have the opportunity to learn things that might help you have a healthier relationship with someone else, as well as improving the relationship you have with yourself.

Divorce as Renovation

Step back from your relationship for a moment and let’s look at this *Vow* from the perspective of renovation. Have you ever

completely renovated your bedroom? As you probably know or can imagine, renovation can be a very emotional and intimidating experience.

The first step in renovation is to remove all personal belongings from the room. Clothes are taken out of the closet, pictures are taken off the walls, every piece of furniture is removed, and every fixture is taken down. Next comes the dirty work, the physically exhausting part of the process: the demolition phase. Sledgehammers are used to break down walls and crowbars are used to pry off molding and baseboards. The wallpaper that was so painstakingly put up years earlier is ripped down and crumpled up. Everything that has been torn down or broken apart is then taken to the dumpster in the driveway. The pervasive dust covers everything and saturates the air, making the chest feel heavy and breathing difficult.

In a few short hours, what was once a personal, intimate space is no longer livable or even recognizable. An integral aspect of your life is out there in the dumpster and you hope to God you will not miss the way the room used to be. You also hope you did not throw out something irreplaceable. Reality sets in. You begin to wonder what you have done. After the dust settles, you go back into the room where you once slept, dressed, and shared intimacies with your spouse. It is now an empty shell and void of color and energy. All you feel is emptiness, and the only things you have kept, aside from a few belongings, are your memories.

In an uncanny way, this description parallels what happens when some couples divorce. They break down a very intimate part of their lives and throw away a good portion of it. Their

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insides feel gutted and hollow. Their walls of protection disappear, and they feel vulnerable. They are afraid of the emptiness and uncertainty they feel inside.

Can you visualize sitting in the middle of this empty, demolished bedroom? What might be going through your head or what feelings might come up? Usually when people renovate, they have thought about what they want to do with the room. They have considered color schemes, storage space, furniture placement, and even the location of electrical outlets.

Have you thought about what your relationship will look like after it has been renovated? Do not be embarrassed to say that you have not. If you are still in the demolition phase of separation or divorce, it is probably all-encompassing and all consuming. You may not have had the emotional energy to do much thinking and planning. But at some point, you need to consider what you will put in the gutted space you have created. Especially if you have children who need parenting, you will need to reenter this space, whether you want to or not, because the responsibilities of parenthood continue whether you are married or divorced.

Synergy

Ideally, good relationships have synergy. That is, each partner's effectiveness is increased because of the dynamics of the relationship. Marital relationships have lots of potential for synergy, and happily married couples often talk about how they bring out the best in one another.

However, the synergy of an intimate relationship is subject to change, to renovation. It is normal for many couples to feel

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the synergy fluctuate as the relationship goes through changes. Synergy is not static and it can sporadically come and go as couples go through life's ups and downs. Sometimes partners feel so joined or connected that they believe they are bringing out the best in each other, but at other times they feel they have lost the connection and are bringing out the worst in each other. The ups and downs of relationships often feel like a rollercoaster ride and staying in your seat during the times of disconnection brought on by conflict can be difficult.

Do not expect divorce to make the rollercoaster feeling go away, but also know that synergy can still exist between divorced partners. It just has a different form. When children are involved, that synergy can be about increasing each partner's effectiveness as a parent. Children need their parents to support one another in being good, effective, and responsible parents because they need the best from both mom and dad to be optimally nurtured. Even a couple with no children can strive to maintain some synergy in their relationship by supporting one another on a personal level.

Especially in the demolition stages, divorce adversely affects the synergy between parents. It is vital that parents work to restore that synergy, as soon as possible, for the sake of the children. They need to be willing to reenter the room they have demolished, reclaiming it as shared, repurposed space.

Redirecting their purpose and energy is a huge challenge for many, if not most, divorcing couples. Yet, by remembering that you will continue to share this space as parents and realizing that a constructive approach will make sharing that space a

whole lot more pleasant, you have a chance to make synergy possible again in the relationship.

Put Down the Sledgehammer

No matter what happened in your marriage at some point you have to be willing to put down that sledgehammer you used to demolish the bedroom. Otherwise you risk tearing down your children's rooms, your entire house, and the neighborhood as well. It is much more difficult to have a synergistic relationship with anyone, if you continue to wield that sledgehammer. If you need help in putting the sledgehammer down, seek professional help. Even if you do not use it, a sledgehammer is extra weight you do not need to carry around and will only hamper your future relationships.

A divorce decree does not automatically give you an excuse to quit trying to work together as parents. For many, parenting post-divorce is an overwhelming role, even if neither one carries a sledgehammer. Some are so emotionally drained from the divorce that they have little energy for the children. When your energy is at its lowest, it is most important to keep your focus on those things that will promote constructive participation and collaboration. Do not sabotage your CIP's genuine efforts to do his or her part by being overly critical or demanding and they may be less likely to sabotage yours. Think and behave constructively whenever you can.

Compromise is invariably the best constructive strategy for any relationship faced with conflict. However, when conflict

leads to divorce many wind up being a power grab between two partners as the process attempts to divvy out various aspects of happiness—including their relationships with the children. Egos struggle when they are asked to share happiness because the ego views happiness as a commodity. (There will be more about happiness in *Vow Eleven*.) But put aside your ego for a moment, if you can, and ask yourself this: Are you more concerned about feeling right or doing the right thing? Are you still in a destructive frame of mind?

If you think and act from a more constructive frame of mind you will more often than not do what is ultimately best for everyone concerned. Invariably this will decrease the financial cost of a divorce as well as the time it takes to recuperate. Maintaining a destructive approach to conflict and problems usually ends up hurting you and your children just as much, if not more, than it hurts your partner. It also is a much more expensive approach, which is exactly what many attorneys strive for. The more you fight the more they make. Legal conflict also costs you more than just out of your pocket. If you insist on taking your CIP to court at every turn, guess who gets to go along too? Not only do you get a higher legal bill, you get the added stress of a courtroom appearance which you pay for with your emotional health.

Losing It

Of course, there are some people who are incapable of collaboration and who may be destructive by nature. They turn everything into dramatic events, living life exclusively through

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their egos. They twist everything their partners say, trying to make them feel guilty, and they spin everything into attacks. Some actually relish the idea of going to court. Dealing with irrational, vindictive and destructive people can make even the smartest, most competent, and thoughtful among us go completely bonkers.

If you find that you have, in fact, gone bonkers, give yourself a break. Dealing with attack-minded people is very stressful and difficult for even the most enlightened person. Your CIP may have put you on the defensive and it is completely appropriate for you to defend yourself emotionally, physically or legally with a reactive self-defense posture. But apply the *Divorce Vows* whenever you can to help keep you balanced and spiritually focused as you deal with the attacks.

You are entitled to your frustrations and moments when you lose your composure. “Losing it” can sometimes be synonymous with letting go. If you lose it and say or do something inappropriate in front of your children for instance, the best response is a simple but honest apology. Let them know that saying or doing destructive things is not helpful but also remind them that you are human, you hurt, and it is not always possible to withhold your feelings. Apologize for dragging them into your drama.

When you do this, you teach your children a number of important things: the importance of recognizing destructive, emotional outbursts; the fact that you are only human and there are times when you need the space to let that humanness come out; and the importance of getting back on track with constructive thinking and behavior after a lapse.

If you think and act from a more constructive frame of mind you will more often than not do what is ultimately best for everyone concerned.

Emotional outbursts can come on quickly, like a wildfire that we are not always prepared for or capable of preventing. While they can be destructive, they can also be a means to clear away the underbrush. Firefighters use controlled burns to get rid of dead underbrush that

might otherwise fuel larger and more destructive fires in the future. Temper these emotional flare-ups as best as you can, but do not be afraid to do a little “control burning” on occasion. Children can be scared by confrontations, but they need to learn that it is sometimes necessary to get things out in the open in order to effectively deal with them.

It is hard to always act with clarity and maturity when our emotions are exposed, but during a calm period, see if you can recognize some of your own hot spots. Which areas of conflict seem to get under your skin the most? Do you duck when your CIP comes out swinging, or do you take the bait and reciprocate in kind? If your relationship with your CIP is overly hostile, seek ways to keep your distance, maintain your boundaries, set realistic expectations, and be protective of your children.

Many confrontations can be minimized if you stay mindful of when and where you meet and what topics you discuss. You need to be in a place that promotes your rational side to lead. For instance, choose to meet in public places, such as coffee shops or restaurants, where both of you are more likely to keep your emotions and voices in check. Find a neutral party,

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whether professional or not, to meet with the two of you as you discuss certain matters. Do not discuss contentious issues when you are overly tired, have had a bad day, or are not feeling well.

Women, in particular, need to be mindful when they might be dealing with hormonal fluctuations. A variety of chemical or hormonal imbalances in both men and women can greatly affect mood and the ability to think clearly, as does alcohol. If you know you are not feeling up to discussing something, especially if it is a hot topic, postpone your conversation until you are in a better physical or mental state to deal with the issue.

Learn to recognize when things are escalating unnecessarily. If you stay engaged in an argument too long you risk coming to verbal fisticuffs if your CIP begins to attack. Sometimes it is appropriate to just say, “No. Not now. We’ll discuss it later.” It is important to come from a peaceful, constructive frame of mind, so think before you speak. (Yes, this is a tough one when we are emotional.) Just remember you cannot expect to have a peaceful encounter if you do not first start with peaceful intentions and use some discretion. Knowing *what to say*, *when to say it* and *how to say it* is a lifetime exercise that most of us will practice our whole lives and still not get quite right. Give yourself a break if this skill eludes you in your relationship.

Going Outside Your Comfort Zone

In spite of what you agree to in a divorce or what is written in the divorce decree, something inevitably might happen that does not quite fit with the agreements you made and will require you to go outside your comfort zones. This is invariably where hot

spots are revealed. For instance, one of you may be forced to change jobs or one of you might get ill. Accidents happen and any number of things can occur to make an agreement in a decree implausible or even impractical. When these unforeseen events occur, your weaknesses and soft spots are exposed because you are forced to make a call on the fly. Hidden agendas then come to the rescue to help protect you from your fears and being hurt.

To see how this works in other areas of our lives, look at how the body naturally protects itself. We will instinctively react in ways to protect important, sensitive or injured parts of the body when we are physically threatened. When something is coming at us we may cover our face or double over and crouch down. We do this to protect our emotions, too, when we are attacked. Be willing to look for these vulnerable spots, and notice how you react and how that reaction might be an attempt to protect yourself. By doing so, you might be able to discover some of your own fears and where you feel vulnerable.

Many of us have fears so far tucked inside us that we are not even aware we have them. The fact that they are so hidden, even to ourselves, partially explains why we get ourselves into certain situations or relationships, and why we make unconscious choices that present us with some of our struggles.

When your CIP seems to go out of his or her way to be uncooperative and unconstructive, just know that they are being ruled by pain and fear and are resisting going outside their comfort zone. You may not always be able to figure out what the real issue or fear is that is dominating a conflict you are having with your CIP, but if you approach your relationship with a constructive attitude, you can minimize the damage and resulting

pain. By having a constructive frame of mind you can slowly learn how to expand your comfort zone and push yourself to go beyond some of your pain.

Tap into Your Spirit

Sometimes constructive, rational, analytical thinking will help you solve a conflict. And sometimes you can try to be constructive and thoughtful and that still gets you nowhere, except more arguing and more ego-oriented posturing.

Remember the analogy of consciously flipping the switch to shed the light on the positive? In some situations, you need to flip your thinking over from your conscious, rational, left brain side to your intuitive, spiritual, right brain side. Thinking your way through problems does not always work. Some of us have a tendency to over-think our problems. We become too analytical and get overwhelmed with all the details. There are times when deferring to your intuitive side in order to *feel* your way to the right path and the best decision is the smartest and most constructive thing you can do.

As discussed in *Vow Three*, intuition is your spiritual guidance system. Sometimes intuition manifests itself as a gut reaction or as a sensation in your chest, as if you are feeling the message. Alternatively, it might be a conscious idea that comes to you through a thought. Sometimes guidance comes in dreams. Whether you call it your higher self, your higher power, the voice of your soul or divine spirit, you have this connection to something beyond this physical world. Regardless of what you call it, how you experience it, or where it comes from, we all

have it. Unfortunately, many of us do not tap into it often enough. Couples going through a divorce are rarely encouraged to use it, but sometimes there are conflicts posed in our relationships that can only be solved by listening to the spiritual part of ourselves.

This higher part of you always seeks your highest good. It is this part of you that will guide you toward more constructive outcomes. Just acknowledge its existence and be ready to hear its voice. If there is a particular issue or aspect of your relationship that is an ongoing, unresolved conflict, be willing to be more intuitive. You do this by asking your spirit, your higher self, what is really going on and how you should best deal with it. Meditate on an issue and see what comes up. Meditation is really just the listening side to prayer. It's one of God's channels to get through to us. As inactive as meditation may seem, it is a very constructive and proactive activity.

If you are willing to ask for intuitive guidance and are open to hear and accept the message, the guidance you receive is, more often than not, right because it is given to you to meet a specific need. In addition to meditating this could also be a good time to journal and let your answers come to you through the written word.

Even when an answer you get leads you to an unpleasant outcome, it leads you there for a reason. And do not be surprised if an answer you get sometimes goes against what your ego wants to do. Remember, survival on strictly a physical level is not always going to be the goal of our spiritual side. Life's goal is not only pleasure; it is growth. Growth often involves pain. We do not always get what we want, but could it be true that we always

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get what we need, even if it is with regard to a difficult relationship, an illness or some other horrific life-changing event? Life gives us the pieces. It is up to us to be constructive and put them together, whether we think our way or feel our way to a solution.

Your CIP may not agree with a solution or decision you have come to. In addition, you may second-guess yourself. Sabotage, in a variety of ways, frequently occurs in the decision-making process. Remember the multiple choice tests we took back in school? We were told to go with our first, gut answer, but how many times did we still go back and try to figure a question out, sabotaging our own efforts?

Life is a multiple choice test. Sometimes there is only one right answer. Sometimes it's "none of the above" and then sometimes it's "all of the above." No wonder many of us walk around confused. Just understand that being constructive is sometimes a left-brain, analytical thinking process that is done in our head (ego) and sometimes it is a right brain, emotional, intuitive process which incorporates more of our heart (spirit.) When we are able to incorporate and use both sides of us we are more likely to find the answers and make the choices that bring us the peace we so deeply desire. At the end of the day we can turn our tests in, happy and satisfied with the outcome.

Emotional Home Repair

People spend inordinate amounts of time and money attempting to discover the source of their problems through therapy and various kinds of counseling. Many of us could use some kind of therapist to perform the role of "personal emotional trainer" to

Sometimes there are conflicts posed in our relationships that can only be solved by listening to the spiritual part of ourselves.

assist us on our inward journeys. If you are reluctant to go to counseling because you cannot afford it financially or are uncomfortable with opening up to a therapist, there are still ways to build, repair, or renovate your relationships (with yourself and

others) on your own. There is a whole industry of do-it-yourself home repair stores that mushroomed up based on this line of thinking, so why not do it with your emotional home?

Let's use this home repair analogy here to better illustrate this point. For example, one day you observe that there is a puddle of water on the floor in the living room. You look up and see that there is a stain on the ceiling and water slowly dripping down. You surmise that the water is coming from someplace in the attic, so you go to investigate.

With a flashlight you crawl around the attic, amongst all the dust and the cobwebs until you finally reach the space right above the living room and with a little more searching you discover a leak in the roof. Now that you know the exact source of the puddle, you are in a better position to correct the problem whether you fix the problem yourself or hire someone to help.

In the same way, you can address and deal with an internal issue by retracing your feelings and thoughtfully examining what happened and where the feelings might be coming from. Whether you choose professional help or you choose a do-it-yourself approach it is worth the effort of looking for yourself where the problem originates.

The home repair example is a very simplistic explanation, but it does show you that you need a constructive, thoughtful approach to solve problems, whether you are repairing your house or repairing your relationship with yourself or others. When you notice something is wrong, ignoring it will not make it go away. A sledgehammer is not the tool of choice to fix a leaky roof. A sledgehammer approach to emotional problems does not work either.

God Speaks—Are We Listening?

If you are unsure whether a problem is best solved with your head (thinking) or your heart (feelings), you might need to follow the advice of the saying, “Let go, let God.” Turn off your mind, open your heart and just listen. Be receptive to the power of prayer.

Ask (pray) for guidance and then be receptive to the answer, however it arrives. It may come to you in clear, precise, analytical thoughts that are rational and logical. Your head clears and you seem to be able to think things through. The answer you get may be more a gut feeling and a releasing sigh. Guidance or wisdom from beyond is multilingual. Be open to the idea that there really is an invisible force in the universe available to us. Whether you want to call this force God, the universal force or the collective consciousness, know that it exists. Many religions teach that God is in all things and that a spark of divinity exists in each one of us. That spiritual spark is what connects us to the wisdom of our higher self and also to each other.

You may find it difficult to know for sure if you are tapping into your ego’s voice or you are being sent a message from God.

Life is a multiple-choice test.

It may be like trying to figure out all the wires you have coming into your entertainment system. Do not worry if you cannot identify all of your internal cables and their connections. The important thing to know is that you are wired and spiritually connected at some point, on some frequency. Turn yourself on and tune yourself in to be receptive to the answers you need.

So if we are all ultimately connected, does God communicate with us? Yes, absolutely. Most of us are just too busy to listen or take notice. For instance, our bodies are often a channel for God to speak to us. We all have had times when our bodies communicated to us through muscle tension or sickness. Some people have experienced quirky accidents and others have experiences that they call “coincidences.” Mishaps, however they occur, very well could be God trying to tell us to slow down, take another path or stop and pay attention.

Here’s one story of a man who wasn’t paying attention:



There was a salesman for an industrial parts company who got promoted to regional sales manager, a job that required a lot of traveling. He suffered from migraine headaches and neck pain and he attributed them to long hours and job stress. The migraines came and went sporadically and he didn’t really pay attention to their timing. He had been married twenty years and while he was not exactly ecstatic in their marriage, he was comfortable enough. At least that’s what he thought. He

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also thought nothing of the increased time he would be away from home with the promotion.

Within his first month on the new job, however, he began to notice that the tension in his neck and his headaches subsided during the work week, but returned as soon as he got on the plane to come home. It was months before he was willing to acknowledge that his marriage, not his job, was the source of the migraines. His higher self (or God) had been speaking to him through his body all along. He simply had not been paying attention.



We engage our higher selves—or they engage us—more than we realize. Life will grab your attention if you do not heed the messages, so you might as well work with them instead of against them. Every once in a while, just be quiet and take the time to listen. Resistance to doing this is normal. You might not feel ready for the answers you get. Your ability to trust yourself might have been damaged. Your faith may be weak. You might not have yet experienced enough, or you might just not be to the point where you are ready to listen.

Just as faith will not disappear because you do not believe in it or are not ready for it, the spiritual, intuitive, God-connected part of you will not abandon you either. Tune in and listen when you are ready, and until then, keep having your experiences.

It is not necessary to concern yourself with whether or not your CIP is tuned in to their spiritual side. Whether they want to tap in is none of your business. Your expectations need to stay

**Guidance or wisdom
from beyond is
multilingual.**

on your own behavior. Invite your CIP to join you in constructive dialogue. Steer conversations away from your ego's needs whenever you can; this

will open the door for both of your spiritual sides to play.

Obviously, you have to deal with your CIP's words and actions and the logistics of your situation, but as often as you can, keep the emphasis on who you are and who you want to become. They are responsible for their own choices and behavior within the confines of the relationship. No matter what they do, you can still have the desire to build and improve your relationship to the best of your ability. Lean on other, healthier relationships in your life that reinforce your constructive approach. Refrain from destructive behavior whenever you can. Try to be more proactive and less reactive. Being constructive also means that sometimes you have to build and maintain your boundaries and stay out of harm's way.

***The most important thing is to show up and be aware
of your own destructive tendencies.***

Notice when you are carrying the sledgehammer that is so easy to pick up when situations get tense. Notice if you are setting any fires that might burn the house down. Be mindful of the attitude that you bring to the relationship. Listen when your spirit is trying to speak to you whether through your body or gut feelings or a book that falls off the shelf at your feet. God works in mysterious ways and so do you. Whether or not your CIP acknowledges any of this or chooses to participate more constructively, it is up to them, not you.

Exercise 8: Renovating

The tearing down, packing up, and moving out process of renovating is a powerful metaphor for how you see your relationship. As you consider the ending of your marriage think about the following questions:

- ✧ What was the tearing down phase of your relationship like?
- ✧ Did either of you carry the sledgehammer more often?
- ✧ Were you in agreement with what you threw away?
- ✧ What do you want to take with you? The big things like the house or the furniture or just personal things and special mementoes?
- ✧ What things do you want to leave behind?
- ✧ Do you want a clean slate so you can start over?
- ✧ Are you being equitable in what you want?
- ✧ What do you want that is just for the kids?
- ✧ What do you want that your CIP wants also?
- ✧ Are there things you do not really want but you don't want your CIP to have them either?

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Your answers to these questions could give you some insight into what you valued most about the marriage. If there were a lot of things you wanted to take with you, maybe it was because you needed more from the marriage than you received and you are attempting to compensate yourself. If there were a lot of things you wanted to leave behind or throw away, then that could be an insight into your readiness to move on.

Renovation of any aspect of your life is scary, but it can be an opportunity to finally put in your life those things that truly are a reflection of who you are.



Vow Nine



I will think of parenting our children as a team effort.

I will not create sides that others must choose from.

*Row, row, row your boat.
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a team!*

Parenting children today is not rocket science. It is *harder!* Raising a family is a highly complicated, emotionally draining, mind-splitting process. Children do not arrive with their own personal instruction manuals. Most parents learn on the fly as they go along.

In addition to dealing with your CIP and his or her parenting skills, you must also contend with influences from teachers, coaches, your children's peers, the media, the Internet, and society as a whole. Parents and their children are pulled in a multitude of directions.

Divorcing parents make it even tougher on themselves when they draw arbitrary lines in the sand and divvy up sides. When parents create sides, they create a divisive, confusing environment for their children. Children raised in divisive home settings can become adults who have a lot of built-up fear-based emotions, such as anger and resentment. Whether married or divorced, parents should think of raising their children as a team effort and try to restore some sense of balance back into their family structure.

Having to choose sides between the two most important people in a child's life can be a lifelong emotional wound that is difficult to heal. Even subtle but frequent requests of your children to take sides can produce feelings of betrayal, guilt and anxiety for both of you.

Instead of looking at your relationship with your CIP from just a legal perspective, focus on your relationship as parents. Are you willing to approach this relationship and your role as a parent from a team concept?

Retaining a Sense of Purpose and Teamwork

While the definition of family may have broadened, however we define it, and the world in some ways has become “the village,” we need to realize that the family will *always* remain the primary provider of physical and emotional care for children. Aside from basic necessities of food, shelter and safety, children instinctively also need to feel loved and need to have a sense of belonging and connectedness. Healthy emotional connections to the family are lifelines that make venturing out into the world less scary. Strong family connections provide a foundation that helps children grow and mature toward independence.

Commitment and Priorities

The institution of marriage provides the legal foundation for a family, but it is the *commitment* of the parents that makes a family strong. Without commitment, even intact families have a harder time producing well-adjusted children. If a marriage ends in divorce, for the sake of the children the parental focus should still be on the commitment to the children’s emotional, physical and psychological well-being. The institution of divorce needs commitment on the part of both parties in order to fulfill

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their responsibilities as parents. Commitment starts with setting priorities.

What priorities have you set regarding how you have raised your children thus far? Priorities often come from our values, what we deem important. What values do you and your CIP share? Can you agree on the same goals?

Find as many areas where you do agree and narrow your focus on those common values and goals to help you set some priorities. These goals could be, for example, supporting the children in areas of education or certain activities, committing to a specific time that you spend with them, setting financial goals for upcoming needs, or planning certain events for the future that they can look forward to. Be specific about what you are and are not willing to do.

For instance, you may not be able to make every soccer match but you are willing to commit to picking them up every Saturday night, or financially you are willing to set aside money for a special camp, birthday gift or college fund. Demonstrate your willingness to *commit* to certain things and the fact that you are a team player and they can count on you. Keep focusing on what you two as parents still agree on and make those common agreements the foundation for your parenting plan.

Best solutions are reached when you can learn how to simplify, unify, and approach each situation from a team mindset. Children are reactionary beings who mimic what they are exposed to. In addition they also need structure. Creating an environment built around teamwork helps provide that needed structure for them and gives them something to model that

they can use the rest of their life. This is a more holistic approach that takes the entire family into consideration and promotes the space where healing can occur.

Aside from setting priorities, another way to initiate a team approach is to discuss with the family how you will get through this adjustment period together. Even though divorce is a very disconnecting experience, and it's painful for you all, interjecting the word "teamwork" into the dialogue helps blur any sides that might have been drawn. It is not easy to let go and deal with loss, especially in childhood, and for many of us, it does not seem to get any easier as we get older. Divorce inflicts so much loss for everyone that the intensity of these feelings is frequently overpowering.

Divorce inevitably involves conflict and it is normal to turn to feelings of blame and guilt. But blame and guilt are means of rationalizing our behavior for the sake of our ego and rationalization often leads to creating or taking sides. The sides we create from the conflict in our relationships come straight from our egos. Sides ultimately create victims and victimizers, and whenever we fail to incorporate some personal responsibility for the loss we feel, we become victims. With your guidance your children do not need to feel they are a victim of the divorce.

Exaggerating Differences and Other Pitfalls

Sometimes there is a direct correlation between what happens outside of us and what we are experiencing on an emotional level. Life is the interaction between physical and emotional experience. For instance, when someone dies, it is normal and

healthy to feel grief. When two people divorce, it is also normal to feel grief. Sometimes, though, a person will magnify their feelings and blow things out of proportion as a way to justify their behavior and bring attention to themselves. They may garner the sympathy and attention they

desire and maybe need, but all at the cost of becoming a victim of circumstance. Out of pain they give away their power.

If you harbor this victim mentality too long you perpetuate a “have vs. have not” experience for yourself. Your CIP may have a lot of financial power or psychological advantage over you. The legal system may have some control over who has what. But neither your CIP nor the legal system has power over what you do or do not feel.

The institution of marriage provides the legal foundation for a family, but it is the commitment of the parents that makes a family strong.

If you come from a have vs. have-not mentality, that is what you will experience, no matter what the physical circumstances are.

Because our society accentuates the “have vs. the have not” mentality it is easy to fall prey to this kind of thinking. From this mindset sides are even easier to draw. These arbitrary lines in the sand then become the boxed-in thinking the ego prefers. The older we get and the more time we have invested in our unfortunately limited view of the world, the harder it is to think outside the box.

Best solutions are reached when you can learn how to simplify, unify, and approach each situation from a team mindset.

If you feel victimized from a divorce and become one of the “have nots,” the harder it might be for you to feel that you are deserving of being one of the “haves.” If you end up as one of the “haves” from a divorce, it may have been the

result of legal maneuvering which could produce a false sense of security.

The job of the ego is to invest time and energy in those things that produce feelings of being right, being in control, and having one’s own way. It is strictly survival-oriented. You cannot completely eliminate the ego’s impact. Physical survival is a powerful motivator. What you can do is recognize when your ego is working overtime and then use your spiritual side to help determine your goals. Your spirit does not embrace the “creating sides” approach. Your spirit knows that deep down you are all in this together. This is the attitude and perspective that will support you in parenting with a team effort approach.

Unfortunately, divorce begets divorce because it is how the parents, by example, have taught their children to resolve conflict. Children whose parents divorced with animosity have a higher chance of having a marriage that ends in divorce, partly because they have learned to create sides instead of building bridges. The cycle of adversarial divorce will be repeated until we realize how this approach to divorce and post-divorce relationships is being passed down as learned behavior, damaging each successive generation.

Standing Your Ground

As mentioned earlier, there are times when you must be willing to fight for what you believe in. Sometimes what is at stake requires you to take a stand when it involves moral, legal or safety-based issues; there is absolutely nothing wrong with doing this in certain circumstances. Be willing to make distinctions between things such as telling the truth and lying, between legal and illegal activities, or between healthy and unhealthy behavior. Get your ego out of it. Be very clear as to why you are so adamant about an issue. What values are you standing up for? Who or what are you protecting? It is an appropriate response to exercise judgment and use your discretion in evaluating a potential outcome of a situation.

For instance, let's say you caught your sixteen-year-old in a lie about an unsupervised party he wants to go to on Saturday night with a buddy and your initial response is to ground him. Your CIP thinks you are overreacting. In this situation what are the issues at stake? As you make your decision you have to factor in the fact that your son lied; the party you know is at an unsupervised house and there will probably be drinking; the safety of how your son would get to and from the party. These are all important issues that warrant you taking a stand if your discretion tells you to do so. Taking a stand based on these factors is not creating sides.

Some individuals avoid taking a stand even when the situation warrants it; they prefer to remain noncommittal because it makes them feel flexible and open-minded. If it serves cooperation and inclusiveness, that's fine. But if it allows either

person to evade responsibility or avoid establishing needed boundaries, it does more harm than good. Knowing how to establish appropriate boundaries is an ongoing lifelong exercise. There sometimes is a fine line between creating sides and setting boundaries so do not get discouraged if it is a challenge to distinguish the difference.

Appropriate Boundaries

Even intact families have their share of conflict, sibling rivalry, and parents who have different parenting styles, as well as conflicting needs and different approaches to the same problem. These differences can still be healthy because it broadens a child's perspective to problem solving if it is done in the spirit of love.

Children then learn that genuine love can be shown in a variety of ways. Love sometimes is tough when demonstrated by a parent who holds their ground and adheres to strict rules when making decisions. Sometimes love is tender, compassionate

Your spirit knows that deep down you are all in this together.

and forgiving, and shown by a parent who gives lots of hugs and has a more nurturing, permissive attitude. There are many ways to show love, offer support,

and administer discipline. There does not always have to be a right way or a wrong way. *Differences do not need to always be seen as separate sides. Differences can provide balance.*

Unfortunately, divorce often exaggerates differences in parenting styles, making those differences more pronounced.

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A parent who was once firm and steadfast, during a divorce, might be accused of being controlling and domineering, while a parent who was once playful and spontaneous might suddenly be characterized as undisciplined and immature. When parents are radically different in personality and parenting styles, lines are even easier to draw. The space between parents with two drastically different styles of parenting creates an even more exaggerated pendulum swing which is frequently the fertile ground for strong egos to emerge. This is all the more reason that you need your spiritual input to help guide you in making some parenting decisions.

When two ego-driven parents try to satisfy their emotional need for love through the parenting process, the children are often placed in the middle. Just know that if the rules are set up where love is the prize to be won at someone else's expense, everyone loses in the end. Love from children should not be bought, bargained for, or manipulated, although many parents try.

Money, too, is frequently used as leverage and a prize to be won. When it is used this way, it invariably creates an imbalance of power. Money is a form of energy that can be used lovingly or for manipulation. It is not necessarily wrong to use money as a motivator or to get something you want. Just be very clear and forthright in how you use it in your relationships.

Keeping Your Children's Futures in Mind

A family is determined less by its form than by its purpose, and how it goes about fulfilling that purpose. The purpose of a

family should be to raise children to adulthood and help them be positive contributors to society, instead of becoming societal problems.

No one sets out to raise a problem child. Problem children can be, though not always, the unintended consequence of parents whose egos are out of control. Parents who emphasize the importance of character development by setting a good example through their own behavior have a much greater chance of raising children who will become happy and productive people.

Children who grow up to be happy, well-adjusted adults, did not achieve this necessarily because of where they laid their head at night, where they hung their clothes, kept their toys, or where they went to school. It probably had more to do with what kind of values they were taught, how they were connected to their family, how they were shown to give and receive love, how they learned responsibility and how their growing up experience prepared them to enter the world.

Divorce need not eliminate a positive growing-up experience for your children, one that will support their growth and development in all these areas. But if you and/or your CIP choose to create discord because of your differences, and not focus on what it takes to raise well adjusted children, your children may choose to act out in negative, destructive ways. Like you they may focus on all that went wrong and not focus on what is really important in order to grow up healthy.

Even if separation and divorce are best for the parents and for the children's overall well-being, children will not necessarily perceive it that way. All they may feel is a sense of loss and

disconnection, especially if they are torn away from their circle of friends. Many children would rather have their parents stay together no matter what. Divorce may never be okay with them. For some, it will take years for them to fully understand how their parents felt.

We all come away with battle scars from growing up. All of us carry certain aspects, both good and bad, of our childhood with us as we grow into adults. Do not give your children an excuse for failing in their adult relationships because of how you chose to handle the end of your marriage. Give them the skills to succeed and a model for relationships that can be healthy, even in the aftermath of divorce. Remember that your children are not harmed nearly as much by the fact that you got divorced as they are by your behavior during the divorce process and post-divorce years.

The “Key”

The following is a story about learning how to use discretion when setting boundaries.



Jim and Kathy were divorced parents with two boys, ages five and seven. Kathy wanted the divorce partly because she felt she had not learned how to set her own boundaries and felt taken advantage of by Jim. Many of her emotional needs were not satisfied in the marriage. She was a giver by nature and she felt she was always the one to sacrifice her needs for the sake of his.

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When she and Jim divorced the real estate market was depressed, so they were unable to sell their home. They agreed that Kathy and the boys would remain in the home until the market improved. After the divorce, Kathy had the house re-keyed, not because she didn't trust Jim, but as a symbolic gesture of establishing her boundaries.

Jim worked an early morning shift and was able to pick the boys up from school every day and take them home or to after-school activities. Frequently, though, he and the boys had to wait outside for Kathy to get home from work. The divorce became final in the early fall, when the weather was pleasant, so it was no big deal for Jim and the boys to hang out together and toss a football around while they waited for Mom.

But when winter came, it was too cold to sit in the car and wait with the engine turned off and gas was too expensive to let the car run for long. Everyone was tired and cranky by the time Kathy finally did arrive home. Invariably, these long days ended with her and Jim fighting. Their relationship deteriorated and she felt caught between getting her work done at her job and getting home to her boys.

It took some weeks, but Kathy finally realized that the most practical solution was to give Jim a key to the house. After all, it was still technically his property too. He faithfully paid half the mortgage payment. He may not have been a good partner for her, but he was a decent man and a responsible, devoted father.

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Once Kathy gave Jim the key to let the boys inside, there was a subtle but noticeable shift in her relationship with him. Not only were the boys happier to see her after a long workday, but on days when she was really late, Jim had already bathed and fed them too. Jim also started doing the kinds of odd repair jobs around the house that he had found excuses not to do in the past. Jim was as happy with the new arrangement as Kathy. That simple act of giving him a key had changed things between them for the better.



There are some divorced couples who would think it unimaginable to share house keys; but consider the lesson of this story in general. Use the story to help you recognize what might be a “key” in shifting your relationship with your CIP for the better. Could there be one issue that could open the door to a better relationship for the two of you?

Attention to Our Inner World

Why is it so hard for us to recognize the keys that would help us have better relationships? One of the reasons is the fact that we have gotten just too darn busy and our priorities are askew. We have gotten so caught up in our high-tech, fast-paced, consumer-oriented world that many of us do not take (or have) the time to pay attention to the inner world and our spiritual growth. On a whole, there has been an imbalance of attention

paid to scientific or technological advancements and not enough attention on who we are becoming as people.

Take for instance our technological advancements in communication. We have put a lot of time and energy into creating a phone that can get reception practically anywhere in the world and yet many of us are not putting energy into becoming someone who is emotionally available to communicate with the person on the other end. Many of us desperately need to work at evolving our inner world. This is the world which holds the keys to happiness. In a nutshell, as we progress towards the future it is vital that our spiritual evolution catch up with our scientific advancements; otherwise our seemingly progressive accomplishments will get the best of us.

This applies across the board, whether we are talking about society in general or the family unit. For instance, it's great if each member of a family is able to have the latest high-tech gadgets and be brought up with the attitude that they need to be their own person, but when this attitude overrides their sense of interdependence and connectedness with others, then this is not progress or growth. This separate kind of attitude does not lead to fulfillment. We need to raise children who grow up to be people who know who they are and at the same time know how to relate and communicate with another—which means to fully understand what having a relationship is all about.

All in the Boat Together

One way to instill this concept of “relatedness” is to approach your family as if you are *all in the same boat*. You may feel as if you

Vow Nine: Parenting: A Team Effort

all are independent of each other, floating along in your personal dinghies, because in many ways you do move separately from one another. However, regardless of physical proximity or legal status, you will be bound together forever on an emotional, non-physical level. The family is a person's first experience of relatedness.

Let's use this "all being in the boat together" analogy to illustrate the importance of *Vow Nine* and the issue of sides. In the nautical world, the opposite sides of a boat are referred to as starboard and port. Notice there is not a right side, nor is there a wrong side. It takes both sides to make the boat. Now think about what happens when too many people are all on one side of a small boat. The boat rocks and it might even tip over. There needs to be proper balance and weight distribution for the boat to stay afloat and navigate properly.

Divorce often feels like being aboard a rocking boat or a sinking ship. Expecting or asking your children or other family members and friends to choose sides only exacerbates the feeling of instability.

Invariably there are two sides to a story, just as there are two sides to a boat, and sometimes it is actually necessary to get everyone on one side of the boat to counterbalance an environmental situation such as high winds or rough water. What's ultimately important is that you two as parents are now co-captains of your family's life-boat. You cannot fight over the helm of the boat without risking the safety of those onboard.

As we progress towards the future it is vital that our spiritual evolution catch up with our scientific advancements.

Divorce Vows

You need to work as a team to navigate your boat and stay on course to fulfill your responsibilities, which is to get you and your children safely across the waters of childhood. Getting everyone to be on one (your) side of the boat just for the sake of feeling validated and being in control is not necessarily going to help you achieve that purpose. What you will accomplish is more rocking, more tipping and less effective steering.

If you allow your ego to set your course and do all the steering, then you have put your focus on the wrong site and if you are not careful, you will end up heading straight for a catastrophe. An iceberg did not sink the Titanic; overinflated egos, lack of focus, preparedness and ignorance did. What iceberg is out there just lying in wait for you? What gaping hole in the form of an emotional scar are you creating when you ask your child to take sides?

Understanding differences is the first step in collaboration. Misunderstandings cause power struggles between two parents. When two people struggle for power over the helm of a boat, what happens? The boat will very likely capsize or swerve hazily with no clear direction. This happens all the time for many couples post-divorce. What will it take to work together as a team, righting your family boat so you all can paddle in the same direction?

If you are waiting for the court to do this through a divorce decree or through post-divorce court orders, you may discover that you are heading into uncharted waters. The courts may be able to right the boat, but that does not mean that the ride will be smooth or your future certain. It is still up to you to drive and steer your boat and maneuver around the storms.

Vow Nine: Parenting: A Team Effort

Parenting children outside the parameters of a marriage is difficult, just as steering a boat in all kinds of water and in all kinds of weather is difficult too. Many parents are so intricately connected to their children that it is not easy to separate their personal, adult feelings, needs, and goals from the goals they have for their children. Even after a divorce, it is hard to separate the personal aspects of who they are from their parenting decisions. To make it even more complicated, lives change. Parents remarry and step-parents enter the picture. New people and problems to deal with are constantly on the horizon.

To simplify and deal with all the complexities, think in terms of being good co-captains of a ship. Your actions should reflect your purpose and commitment as parents. Decisions based on unconditional love are emotionally balancing and will help you to stabilize the boat. Decisions based on guilt, anger, or revenge are likely to rock your family's boat and will spiritually keep you from having peace. No matter what your personal or family goals are, *if you focus on making decisions that do not create sides, you enhance your chances of achieving your ultimate objective: raising kids who grow up to be happy and productive adults.*

Exercise 9: The Bowl of Fruit

Here is a simple but powerful exercise to illustrate the “two sides” dilemma that we face every day in all our relationships.

Imagine that you and your CIP are sitting across from each other at a table. On the table in front of you is a huge, beautiful bowl of fresh fruit. You are each asked to write down a description of what you see. You write down that the bowl contains a pineapple surrounded by a mound of apples and peaches, cherries lining the edge, and a banana sticking out of the top. At the same time, your CIP writes his or her own description. When finished, the two of you exchange what you have written. To your amazement, your CIP’s description is totally different than yours. Your CIP describes a bowl containing a cantaloupe surrounded by a mound of oranges and nectarines, strawberries lining the edge, and a banana sticking out of the top.

Both of you were probably expecting to hear validation of what you saw in the bowl. When asked to change seats, it becomes quite evident that both of you were correct in your descriptions. You both were able to see the obvious fruit sticking out of the top but all the other fruit was there too, just not visible from your vantage point. It was each person’s perspective that limited their description and created conflicting reports. Perspective is what creates sides.

Isn't it true that we only see or experience a small portion of the whole picture in life? And yet, don't we make decisions based on our experiences and believe that we are right based on our limited point of view? It is not always easy or even possible to turn the bowl of fruit around or change our vantage point when you argue with your CIP. Sometimes you must be willing to acknowledge that your CIP sees the bowl of fruit differently based on his or her vantage point. There is not always a right and a wrong side to every dispute. It is not always necessary to argue, disagree, or try to change your CIP's mind. Nor is it always necessary to try and convince someone else that your perspective is right.

Using this bowl of fruit analogy, think of a particular issue about which you and your CIP disagree. Describe what you think their perspective is and why. What is your perspective? How are your opposing perspectives creating opposing sides? Would you be willing to change sides of the table figuratively and see things from his perspective? Would you be willing to allow her to have a different perspective without making her feel wrong for doing so? Try to determine whether it is the specific issue that is the real problem, or if the problem is only caused by the fact that you two are stuck in only seeing things from your own perspective and not willing to walk to the other side of the table.

Let life be the whole bowl of fruit.



Divorce Vows

Notes

Vow Ten



I will support our extended relationships.

*I will not discourage our family members
from caring for one another.*

*If you can't help someone,
at least get out of their way.*

Vow Ten: Extended Relationships

When two people marry, they not only unite two lives, they unite two families and two groups of friends, creating a variety of relationships. *Vow Ten* is about protecting these relationships and acknowledging their value after the divorce.

Vow Ten is important because divorce impacts not only the immediate family, but it has the potential to affect the extended family and friends as well. Remember, each couple sets the tone, and family and friends will feed off of the couple's attitude. Meaningful relationships are much easier to continue for everyone if the divorcing couple is civil and recognizes the value of these relationships.

With that in mind:

- ✧ Can you see the benefit to your children of maintaining relationships with your CIP's parents, and other close family members?
- ✧ Could you accept a friend's desire to stay in contact with your CIP?
- ✧ If your parents were particularly close to your CIP, would it be okay with you if they maintained that relationship?
- ✧ Can you see how having a supportive, inclusive attitude could make you more attractive to a new partner, someone who is loving, nurturing, and giving?

Vow Ten is about how you hold others in your life. It asks you to see these extended relationships from their perspective, not yours. How have you been supporting extended relationships in your situation?

Taking Sides Hampers the Process

We are taught that love makes the world go round, blood is thicker than water, and friends are the glue that helps keep us together. The need to support nurturing familial relationships should be obvious. So why do some divorced people find it difficult to support these extended relationships?

This usually happens when a couple is prone to creating sides, as was discussed in *Vow Nine*. When sides are created, it is as if alliances have been established and one partner does not want their side fraternizing with the opponent. Relationships, then, that were once close and nurturing can become so strained and uncomfortable that they eventually are just avoided altogether. The loss of these once meaningful and fulfilling relationships becomes the collateral damage of divorce. Grandparents end up with limited access to their grandchildren, friendships are severed, and family ties are broken when the bitterness of divorce causes people to take sides. In far too many cases, the family and its extended relationships get pulled into the controversies surrounding a contentious divorce.

You can probably think of a couple you knew who went through a divorce and with whom you are no longer friends. It was awkward to socialize with both after the divorce, so instead

of choosing one, you just stopped socializing with either of them. Or perhaps you chose one partner, which angered the other, who now won't even talk to you.

Remember, each couple sets the tone, and family and friends will feed off of the couple's attitude.

It seems to be harder and harder these days for many to act maturely when it comes to social and personal conflict. Various displays of immaturity have been on the rise in our society and now they are unfortunately common behavior. The rise in road rage and bullying on the Internet are two examples. Divorce often elicits behaviors that are reminiscent of our puberty years. If someone has a childish, selfish side, divorce often brings it out. Some divorce negotiations might as well have been convened in the halls of a junior high school. The dialogue was not much different with the name-calling and the juvenile accusations.

Think back to your own junior high or middle school years. Remember when so-and-so broke up with so-and-so and you were no longer allowed to talk to them or be their friend? Remember the pettiness? The drama? The backstabbing? The stories told that were not remotely true but became the source of juicy gossip anyway? You put your hopes in high school only to find similar behavior. You might have thought that college and the post-college adult world would be different, that you would finally find mature people. What has been your experience?

What has happened is that we live in a society that condones immature behavior, or at least looks the other way. Celebrities often model immaturity and there is little social expectation that

they will take responsibility for their actions. It's sad to say, but what celebrities model, the public adopts.

We have also disregarded how much we need each other. We are much more alike than we would like to admit. Far too much of our lives is driven by our ego's desires and fears and far too little is spent adhering to our spiritual needs. Ironically, what we are all desperately looking for is a sense of connection, belonging and love, which can only be found in stimulating and supportive relationships, the very thing that divorce often destroys.

The Brain Connection

Why do we do this? The low-level behavior that emerges for many people when they go through divorce has its roots in basic human emotions that are intrinsically part of the human experience. The ego's need for love and safety is normal. The need for belonging and connectedness is too. These needs and their corresponding emotions are fundamental aspects of being human because they are part of the survival mechanisms deeply rooted in that part of the brain that we have in common with lower species.

This part of the brain is where your instinct to seek out nurturance is located. In newborns, the rooting reflex occurs when a baby, who is only minutes old, seeks out its mother's nipple for nurturance. We are also internally wired to seek out safety through proximity. This is manifested when toddlers go through separation anxiety. Toddlers cry inconsolably because they are stressed from being separated from their mother or

Vow Ten: Extended Relationships

primary caregiver. Instinctively, they are grappling with feelings of letting go of what they know as security and of becoming more autonomous and separate. Then, between the ages of two and four, young children start to notice differences between themselves and others. They want what others have and go through the “mine” stage. (You parents will remember this stage oh so well.)

Each one of these primal stages of human development resembles one of the stages that many divorcing people go through, due to the separation and loss of a relationship. That is why it is common, and almost expected, for a partner to seek out love and nurturance, to go through a period of separation anxiety, and to go through a stage of comparison and declare what is “mine.” Divorce often feels like a matter of survival, so unconsciously this causes many to resort to survival instincts and literally go into survival mode.

Sadly, too many of us live our lives making choices driven solely by signals from our ego’s need and thus resort to survival mode. We live “unconsciously” because we do not put a lot of conscious effort into understanding why we do what we do. Some rarely experience the feeling of being really connected to another. Others bounce from relationship to relationship, in search of something they may not even be able to define. To find what we are looking for, we need to use the more spiritually oriented part of our brains. We will then realize that we are emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually more connected than we thought. *It is our capacity for higher thought that allows us to **know** we are connected.*

Choose to be Supportive

Our relationships with others, and especially with those we love, give us these experiences of wholeness, aliveness, connectedness, and belonging that we so deeply desire. When we deny these relationships, we deprive ourselves and others of having these experiences. When in survival mode we can be overtaken with feelings of need and insecurity that come straight from the ego. Emotional balance and that peaceful, contented state that we long for will not be achieved at an unconscious level. It takes conscious thought to override some of these deeply rooted responses.

For instance, when your son tells you he wants to move in with his father, or your daughter tells you she wants to spend more time with her mom, you might have a survival response related to fear. This could come in the form of fear that your child loves their mom or dad more than you, fear that you will miss them too much, or fear that your child will turn against you.

A more conscious response to these situations might be for you to recognize that even though you will miss him terribly, your son needs time with his father to grow into manhood. Even though you may have feelings of jealousy of their close relationship, your thirteen-year-old daughter needs more motherly input. You do not have to take their need to spend time with the other parent as rejection. Put aside your feelings and let your children take back a little of the control that was taken from them when you divorced.

Emotions stemming from some form of fear are part of your survival instinct, and it is perfectly normal for you to have these

thoughts and feelings. What is not healthy for you or your child is to always make choices based on these emotions. Having said that, we are going to have our knee-jerk responses sometimes. We have all said or done something that turned people against one another, whether we did it on purpose or we said it in the heat of the moment. Sometimes it is hard not to react inappropriately when your family throws you a curve.

Divorce often feels like a matter of survival, so unconsciously this causes many to resort to survival instincts and literally go into survival mode.

Even if your CIP is not, in your opinion, the best role model for your child, give your child the latitude to figure that out for himself. You can subtly express your concerns. *Vow Ten* is not saying you have to go out of your way to encourage relationships. Just do not become an obstacle to them.

Of course, not all families are healthy ones in which to raise children, such as those with drug/alcohol addicts and physically or emotionally abusive family members. But aside from contact with highly dysfunctional people, children need to be connected to where they came from. It helps give them a sense of their family roots and traits, both good and bad.

Hiding our skeletons and keeping family secrets does not promote conscious living and conscious choices. When we give our loved ones the space to explore and develop their own relationships, we are providing a context in which real growth and learning can take place. Children and adults can learn a lot about who they are, as well as who they choose *not* to be,

through their relationships. Do not become a barrier to someone else's learning process.

Visualize Personal Peace First

Anyone, but especially children, deprived of the opportunity to nurture important, close relationships can feel incomplete, and those feelings can then become part of their core identity. Incomplete relationships might be one of the reasons so many people have identity crisis and seem to be lost souls in search of something. Perhaps they are trying to fill the void left by unacknowledged love. There could be a host of explanations as to why people seem to feel lost, anxious, confused or acquire addictions. What is true is that we have a society full of people in search of love and meaning to their lives.

When we feel connected through love, especially with our family and primary relationships, we feel more balanced and spiritually aligned with something bigger and greater than ourselves. Spiritual alignment in our relationships makes it easier for us to figure out where we fit into the grand scheme of life and how to recognize peaceful solutions when the universe tests us with problems and conflict.

To achieve spiritual alignment with others it helps to first believe that everything and everyone in your life happens for a reason, if for no other reason than what you declare it to be. Then, encourage love and support for all those relationships close to you. And finally, focus more on what unites you and your loved ones instead of on what divides you so that it is easier to move forward in a positive direction.

Vow Ten: Extended Relationships

It would be interesting to survey how many people who have the bumper sticker “visualize world peace” on their cars who themselves went through a divorce that resulted in anything but peace in their own private world. Maybe their focus was misplaced. Instead of just giving lip service to the *idea* of world peace, maybe they should have focused on learning how to visualize personal peace. As Mahatma Gandhi said, “We must be the change we want to see in the world.” World peace can only happen when enough of us visualize personal peace and make that a priority first.

It may seem a stretch to connect the divorce of two people with world peace, but peace has to start somewhere. Why not start with the most basic source of all human love and conflict—the family. What you do on a personal level does affect the world at large. Remember how many lives George Bailey touched in the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Now with things like Facebook and other social websites we each have the power to connect countless number of lives. Think about how many lives you touch when you forward loving, thoughtful emails. There is a powerful ripple effect not just from your actions, but from your thoughts too. That is the power of prayer. Peace is something we all need to learn how to “pay forward” if to no one else but to our children.

Personal peace has more to do with the journey than it does with the destination. Start with peace as the end in mind and then take action towards that goal. Now more than ever we need people with this kind of visionary thinking. For “where there is no vision, the people will perish.” (Proverbs 29:18; King James Version)

Divorce Vows

Think back to September 11, 2001. How did your vision for the world change that day? What kind of vision did those rescuers need to have to do their work? When faced with a monumental task like that, where does one start to clean up such a huge mess? You start with one brick at a time, that's where—one bucket at a time. Those who were part of the cleanup knew and felt that they were all in it together and what got them through that very painful process was the love and support they felt for one another.

That is how you deal with the rubble and destruction that divorce often creates . . . Slowly . . . Sometimes very slowly. One thought at a time . . . One conversation at a time . . . One interaction at a time. It can be painful to realize the life you had together is gone and not feel grief and despair. Sifting through the debris from your torn apart life and finding the love and life that could still be buried underneath it all might be the bravest and most visionary thing you will ever do. People never die thinking they should have looked for love less. Our regrets are usually about the opportunities for love that we overlooked.

Personal peace has more to do with the journey than it does with the destination.

Will you still have feelings of jealousy when your child comes home and tells you what an awesome time he had with Dad? Maybe. Will you still make decisions from a survival mode

and not feel supportive of your daughter moving closer to her Mom? Possibly. Will you still feel like you are competing for love and attention during the holidays? Hard not to sometimes.

Vow Ten: Extended Relationships

Will you feel hesitant to have your child call a former in-law to wish them happy birthday? Hopefully just the first time. What you can do from here on out is to be more cognizant of when you are having those love-stripping feelings. You may be less inclined to give into them just by noticing that those feelings or decisions are not for anyone's highest good. Then you can build appreciation for the joy and closeness that others' relationships bring them.

The love your child has for others is a gift to be cherished. Their capacity to love tells you that you have done your job. You and your family deserve more than the legacy of pain that divorce so often leaves behind. Do not let the love that your family and friends have for one another get lost and buried. Love that you nurture and set free eventually returns to nurture you.

***We should love one another as
God so loved the world.***

Exercise 10: The Good Driver

Vow Ten discussed the need to sometimes override our subconscious tendencies. There are many times in life when we go on autopilot and resort to survival mode. We make choices and react without even thinking. If we have been taught well and have good skills, then going on autopilot is not a bad thing.

For instance, many of us are “autopilot drivers.” Most of the time, we drive without really thinking about it. For this exercise, we are going to look at what makes a good autopilot driver and use these characteristics to help us determine what makes a good partner.

What are the characteristics of a good driver?

Generally, a good driver is a person who has been taught how to operate a vehicle safely and smoothly. They know the rules of the road and obey them. They drive defensively when necessary and watch out for the other guy, and are courteous and considerate of fellow drivers. When someone has been taught to be a good driver then their autopilot reactions to any situation are usually more appropriate.

Listed on the next page are some specific traits of a good driver.

Vow Ten: Extended Relationships

Good drivers:

- ✧ keep their eyes on the road ahead and focus on where they are going;
- ✧ use their side and rearview mirrors to keep abreast of traffic around them;
- ✧ check their gauges for speed, temperature, battery power, and fuel;
- ✧ communicate their intentions with other drivers by using their turn signals;
- ✧ refrain from cursing or using obscene gestures at other drivers;
- ✧ do not use speed as a means of competing with other drivers;
- ✧ have a destination in mind and have an idea of how to reach it;
- ✧ use a map when they are unsure of what road to take;
- ✧ do not primp in the mirror;
- ✧ do not tail gate;
- ✧ do not pick up hitchhikers or give rides to people they deem unsafe;
- ✧ require every passenger to buckle up;
- ✧ do not talk on their cell phone or text while driving;
- ✧ do not drink alcohol and drive;
- ✧ do not drive in dangerous weather or road conditions except in an emergency;
- ✧ drive with passenger safety in mind; and,
- ✧ obey all road signs.

Continued on next page

All of these good driving principles could be used as general guidelines when thinking about what it takes to be a good partner in a relationship. Your assignment is to take each characteristic and write a translated version of each guideline in a way that you could apply to relationships.

For instance, let's take the first characteristic: "Good drivers keep their eyes on the road and focus on where they are going." You could translate this into: "Good partners keep their focus on where their relationship is going. They do not let themselves get distracted with people, things or situations that deter them from what is best for their relationship and family."

Have fun and be creative by seeing how many correlations you can make between being a good driver and being a good partner. Once you have your translated list of what it takes to be a good partner, think about how many of these things you are consciously doing. How often do you go into autopilot (unconscious) in your relationship? Do your autopilot skills serve your relationship well? If not, then what areas or skills do you need to work on to make you a better partner?



Vow Eleven



I will respect and support your potential.

I will not obstruct your path to happiness.

*I've learned that everyone wants to live
on top of the mountain,
but all the growth and happiness occurs
while you're climbing it.*

—Anonymous

The underlying premise of *Vow Eleven* is that every person has potential that is unique and everyone wants to be happy. The first part refers to wanting and supporting the best for each other. If, for whatever reason, you cannot do this at this time, then the second part merely states that you will not go out of your way to sabotage your CIP's pursuits.

Many of us claim we want to be happy and realize our dreams but we often allow our experiences—and, in particular, our relationships—to stop us. We tend to blame other people, i.e. our parents, spouses, children, bosses, and a host of circumstances for our not having what we want. This is a classic victim mentality approach to life, and it is often our own limited thinking that holds us back. This *Vow* encourages you to think in terms of unlimited possibilities.

Vow Eleven uses all of what you have learned from the other *Divorce Vows*. The goal here is for you to be a spiritual if not an emotional support system for your CIP. It does not mean that you need to financially or even physically support your CIP, unless you choose to do that. This is strictly an idea that encourages you to view your relationship and your CIP from a spiritual perspective. When you are able to apply this *Vow* to your relationship, you inject spiritual love into it, which is the kind of love and legacy that is worthy of passing on to your children.

Relationships and Happiness

You may be born with specific abilities or into a particular family or situation, but your destiny may be determined to a huge degree by the relationships you form stemming from the choices you make. Relationships provide the love and support often needed for success. Happiness can also be influenced by how you choose to interact with your environment and respond to your circumstances. In addition, being happy and reaching your dreams can be tied to the kind of relationship you have with yourself, that relationship you have between your ego and your higher self. The bottom line is this: If peace and happiness elude you, look to your relationships for answers.

When you look at the relationships you have created in your life and get to the heart of what has worked and what has not worked, it helps you figure out what you want and what makes you happy. The pursuit of happiness is rarely a straight shot but is a long, learning curve. It is often filled with detours, dead-ends and mistakes along the way.

Whether you were the initiator and in favor of the divorce or it was imposed on you against your wishes, you have a dilemma. How are you going to now be happy post-divorce? Here are two questions to ponder. They both imply a choice in the matter.

- ✧ How can I be happier because we got divorced? Or,
- ✧ How can I prevent a divorce from making me unhappy?

There is a school of thought that proposes that others do not *make* us happy (or unhappy, angry, excited, depressed, etc.).

Rather, we *allow* them to make us happy (or unhappy, angry, excited, depressed, etc.). This means that whatever our emotional experiences are in life, they are the result of having surrendered our power to others who we then allow to determine how we feel. We erroneously think we have no choice in the matter.

Believing that we have a choice in our feelings is a hard concept for many to grasp because it often feels like we are constantly confronted with people who really *seem* to make our lives a whole lot more difficult or a whole lot more pleasurable. To put the responsibility for our success or happiness on ourselves is not an easy one to swallow. However, if you can take some ownership for your happiness, you will actually find it easier to be happy, and pursuing your dreams will be a more joyous journey.

Watch the movie, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, to see how one man put this idea into action. If you are unhappy about your relationship or divorce, ask yourself this question: Is your CIP actually doing or going to do something to prevent you from pursuing your happiness, or are you allowing that to be done to you because of your own limited attitude? You may feel that your CIP and/or others are hell-bent on making your life miserable and sometimes this may be true. However, are you doing everything possible to counteract their actions? Are you making wise choices to position yourself in such a way that life does not have to be so stressful? How are you handling these boulders in your life?

Happiness and success starts first with the right attitude but then the follow-up is critical to achieving your goals. As the old saying goes, you have to walk the walk. Henry Ford is

credited for a humorous take on this when he said, “Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, either way you’re right.” The bottom line is what are you doing to make your dreams and your happiness a reality?

Another thing: how much of your CIP’s happiness are you trying to dictate? Are you wasting a lot of precious energy in the form of competitive thoughts and sabotaging actions towards their happiness? By doing this, aren’t you just taking energy away from your own? Your happiness and whether or not you achieve your dreams has a lot to do with where you choose to focus your energy. Whether you or your CIP actually reach your

If peace and happiness elude you, look to your relationships for answers.

potential or become happy is not the main focus of *Vow Ten*.

It is about having the attitude, the perspective to build your own “field of dreams.” Like all the other *Vows*, this one is about the context, the journey, not

the specific destination. It only points in a direction. It does not necessarily guarantee an outcome.

You might be wondering how you can find the motivation to support someone who has caused you pain. You might wonder, *How can I support his growth when I feel like he has not been supportive of mine? Or, Why should I want her to succeed when she has gone out of her way to be critical of my desire to succeed?* This is one of the tallest orders for any divorcing couple. It asks you to let go of the person your CIP has been and focus on who they could become. It also asks you to let go of who you were and be open to who you want to become.

The Ego and Happiness

Vow Ten really calls out your ego and forces it to reveal itself. Your ego wants to believe that your CIP could not survive, let alone thrive, outside the relationship without you. Your ego might resist the idea of accepting your CIP being happy without you, or worse yet, happy in another relationship. *How dare they be happy without me?* is a common subconscious thought. If you have this feeling and allow yourself to nurture it, you run the risk of not allowing yourself to be happy without them.

Remember, just as individuals have unique potential, relationships also have unique potential. When a marital relationship does not live up to its potential and “fails,” it is normal for each partner to feel like a failure on a personal level. It is hard to look failure square in the eye and tell the truth about it. This will take willingness on your part to own up to your shortcomings and take responsibility for your mistakes, but when you do so, you are much less likely to repeat the same mistakes in the future. Personal responsibility is part of the path to peace.

For some, the pursuit of happiness seems to be riddled with one mistake after another and the destination becomes elusive. Just when they think they have achieved something they thought would make them happy, they discover it was but an illusion, a phantom destination. They have allowed their egos to define happiness and success without realizing that their spiritual side might not agree with the ego’s definition of *having arrived*. This is what is behind the saying that money can’t buy happiness. Just because the ego seems to be happy with financial success does not mean the spirit will feel fulfilled.

Just because the ego seems to be happy with financial success does not mean the spirit will feel fulfilled.

A couple's pursuit of success and happiness in a relationship is no different. Most marriages start out "happy." As time goes by happiness becomes a goal that could look different for each couple. For many couples,

happiness is having a warm, nurturing home and raising a family together. Other couples may want to achieve a certain monetary goal or status. Some couples just seek companionship or the ability to maintain a relationship devoid of conflict, while others seem to actually be the happiest when they argue and engage in spar-like conflict.

Divorce often occurs because the definition of happiness changes for one or both partners. How would you describe happiness for yourself in an intimate relationship? Do you believe your definition of happiness is different than your CIP's? If so, how does it differ?

When marital bliss is elusive, many people come to the conclusion that it must be the fault of their mate, or finances, or meddling in-laws, or the stress of raising a family, or sexual dissatisfaction. Some people feel that if only their partners behaved a certain way or possessed certain characteristics, then they could be happy. For these people, happiness seems to be on the outside looking in. These situational problems or personal issues are contributing factors, but they rarely tell the whole story. Happiness in a relationship happens when it begins inside each partner and works its way out into the outer world.

Seeking self-awareness is the best starting point for both the

Vow Eleven: Potential & Happiness

pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of your personal potential. If you become aware of some of your core beliefs you might find it easier to reach a desired destination. Here are some questions to jumpstart an inquiry around your core beliefs about success and happiness:

- ✧ Are some people born naturally happy or can happiness be cultivated?
- ✧ Does happiness come and go for you based mostly on outside circumstances?
- ✧ Does luck have any role to play in being successful or do we make our own luck?
- ✧ Do you need a certain amount of money or things to feel happy or successful?
- ✧ When you have been happy in life, what were the circumstances?
- ✧ What core beliefs about happiness and success did you impose on your relationship?
- ✧ Do you have a support system that truly supports your success?

The first step toward self-awareness is simply stepping outside yourself and acknowledging that you have an ego. (Review *Vow Two*.) That alone can shift your perspective from one driven strictly by the ego to one in which your spiritual side has a chance to develop. Another step is to understand that everybody else also has an ego and that most of us unknowingly live the majority of our lives through our ego's perspective. This understanding makes you better prepared to deal with others. You know what's on the table.

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When you claim that you are trying to be successful or happy, you could be making choices based on unconscious fears and the needs of your ego. You do this unless you purposely and knowingly step outside of it from time to time to gain a different perspective.

Step outside your ego for a moment and ask, for instance, if you would be willing to accept the idea that your CIP might be happier and better off not married to you or that you might be happier and better off not married to them. This is a tough question but one that must be addressed for a divorce to be for your higher good. Another question is did you love your CIP for who they could be (potential) or for who they were? Do you think they loved you for who you could become or for who you were? How did you two live up to each other's expectations?

Most relationships are a mixture of love and need. Remember it is part of the human experience to need. So what aspects of your spouse did you think you truly loved and what parts did you just need? A really radical question to contemplate is this: If we had a more spiritual perspective to our relationship would we really need to get a divorce? Could we rekindle our relationship and go back and try it again?

When two people join lives in marriage, not only do they interconnect on a physical plane, they also connect with each other spiritually, and through the development of self-awareness (or lack thereof). As was said earlier, many people operate their lives on a very superficial and unconscious level most of the time. Aside from doing things because they feel good, look good, or because other people say they should be doing them, many people are unaware of the real driving force behind what they do.

When two such people marry, the relationship will likely stumble along, leaving the couple oblivious as to what works and what does not. All they know is that some days they are happy. They feel in love and connected and the marriage works. But then some days nothing about the relationship is right and they have antagonistic thoughts toward one another that they sometimes act on.

Some people are often drawn to others who have egos similar to theirs. They might have the same likes and dislikes and similar values. The conflict in these relationships is often kept to a minimum. As a result, they might assume that because there is little conflict, they have a strong, healthy relationship. However, these ego-based, unconsciously driven relationships can be easily threatened when things change.

There are many marriages that perk along pretty well, even over long periods of time, until they experience a crisis—a plot point. Because they have been unaware of what has really kept them together, the change or crisis will have the capacity to become bigger than the relationship. That is, unless they have the capacity to step outside their egos and muster the willingness to become more self-aware. By doing this they have a greater chance of discovering what truly connects them or what exactly it is that drives them apart.

Keep the Spirit of Love Alive

Every relationship we have directly or indirectly affects who we are and who we become. More than any other relationship, except maybe the one we each had with our parents, marriage

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impacts our physical lives in the most profound ways. Who you marry impacts where you live, your financial status, your career, whether you become a parent, your social life, and your religious affiliation, among other things.

When a divorce occurs, many of these aspects of your life will no longer be directly influenced by the relationship and yet, some still are. What is important to keep in mind is the capacity to impact each other's physical lives. How can you expect your CIP to extend the space for you to reach for your potential if you are unwilling to reciprocate?

To move beyond the divorce decree, recognize that each of you will need some reverence for the other's happiness if the divorce is to be not only the best physical solution, but the best spiritual solution as well. You have no control over whether your CIP has the capacity to want success and happiness for you, let alone whether they have the capacity within themselves to be happy. As was mentioned earlier, each person's definition of happiness comes into play in the marriage. It will also come into play in the divorce.

Even if the divorce was not your choice and you are not happy about it, you can still see the divorce as an opportunity to show your love for your partner by letting him or her go and blessing them on their way. The most difficult and selfless expression of love that a human heart can demonstrate is to let go of someone they love and find joy in their happiness. For any moment of selfless love will stand out among the rest. As Henry Drummond, nineteenth-century Canadian poet, said: "You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand

out, the moments when you have really lived are the moments when you have done things in the spirit of love.”

The Dorothy Effect

As often as you can, approach the relationship with your CIP from outside your ego, even if that is only for brief moments at a time. Take time to explore what is really going on inside you. It is all too common for individuals to run away from relationship problems and look to someone or something outside themselves for happiness or to give them solutions to their problems. These outside influences can point you in a direction, but real happiness and real solutions to personal issues can only be found and solved within.

This is the theme of a well-known story, one many of us were first exposed to as children. Unfortunately, most of us did not appreciate the deeper message that the story imparted, and failed to incorporate its wisdom into our lives. That story is *The Wizard of Oz*. In essence, we have created a society of Dorothys, who are constantly turning to someone outside themselves to point the way home. Like Dorothy, many of us have become deluded into thinking that there is a great all-knowing wizard out there who can solve our relationship problems or at least mitigate them.

Only after going through our own personal haunted forests (life experiences) and escaping from evil witches (fears of the ego) who want to take away our power (our personal responsibility) do we realize (become self-aware) that we are wearing a

The most difficult and selfless expression of love that a human heart can demonstrate is to let go of someone they love and find joy in their happiness.

pair of red slippers (our God-given free will) that have had the power all along to show us the way home. These slippers represent the power that God gave us over our own lives. They have been bestowed upon our soles (souls) and are activated when we confront and defeat

the witches (egos) in our life. No one can use them but us, nor can anyone take them from us either.

Unfortunately, the realization that they are wearing these slippers is too much for many people. They continue to look outside themselves for solutions, outside themselves for happiness. They focus on how they can change others so that they can finally be happy instead of how they should change themselves. They do not want to be responsible for their actions, their marriage, their children or their divorce. As a society, we continue to think that the place to solve the problems we have in a marriage is by getting a divorce through the legal system, instead of encouraging the spiritual side to take more of an active role in the solution.

Morality cannot be legislated, yet we keep trying to do just that. No court can make individuals act civilly or morally. Only we can do that for ourselves. When we stop placing limits on our thinking, on our potential, we will stop placing limits on our experiences. And when we do that, not only will our divorce experiences become easier to manage, we will also be happier people.

Life is a Mountain, Not a Beach

Does your life feel more like a mountain climb or a stroll on the beach? For many people, it is more like a mountain climb. It is never easy, and it always seems like an uphill battle. Let's use the analogy of mountain climbing to look at your marriage or relationship.

Mountain climbers are all kinds of people with varying levels of ability. There are some mountain climbers who like to tackle mountains in a freestyle fashion, using only their bare hands and no safety equipment. Freestyle climbers in life are usually the ones who live paycheck to paycheck. They do not have insurance policies, and they think and act as if rules are for everybody but them. They scoff at anyone who exercises common sense, and they dodge trouble through manipulation and coercion. If you saw someone climb a mountain without safety equipment, would you like them as a climbing partner?

There are also those who choose mountains to climb that look more like gently rolling slopes. They like to proceed slowly and methodically, carry all kinds of safety equipment, rest often, and take each step with caution. These are the people who see life as limited and scary, and take no risks unless they are forced to. They can be a bit boring and dull.

Most people fall between these two extreme examples. We each prefer different equipment, go at different paces, search out different destinations, and need rest at different spots. The main point is that we are all climbing different mountains in life in our pursuit of happiness and fulfilling our potential, however we define it.

A Climbing Partner

When you include a relationship with another person in this analogy it becomes vastly more complicated. When a couple gets married, in essence, each gains a climbing partner. The kind of climbing partners they are to one another determines, in part, the kind of marriage they will have.

Some couples are like climbing partners who scale a mountain very close to one another. Even if they are climbing separate mountains, their experiences and paths parallel one another. Other couples are distant climbing partners. One may be climbing a mountain that is so far away that their partner cannot see them and they have to use radio contact to communicate. These are the relationships that stay connected mostly via the cell phone.

In addition to climbing together, the marital partners are also tethered together—whether by a wisp of a string so fine that it is barely there and tied to their little toes or by a rope that is thick and tied like a noose around their necks. Each couple's tether is unique and of their own making. There are an infinite number of ways to imagine how two people could be joined together on our allegorical marriage mountain.

What would be helpful here is for you to use this analogy to describe your own marital tether.

- ✧ What kind of a climbing partner was your spouse?
What kind were you?
- ✧ In your marriage, were the two of you climbing the same or similar mountains?

Vow Eleven: Potential & Happiness

- ✧ Were you in agreement on the equipment and supplies you used?
- ✧ Were you comfortable with the safety devices you had and how you used them?
- ✧ Did you feel emotionally or physically secure most of the time, some of the time, or none of the time?
- ✧ Did you climb at the same pace?
- ✧ Did you have the same destination?
- ✧ Did you like the way the tether felt? Was it too tight, too slack or virtually nonexistent?
- ✧ Did you achieve energy and motivation in similar ways, or did you recharge your batteries differently?
- ✧ Were you good at giving each other a hand up when the going got tough, or did you create rock slides for each other that you constantly had to watch out for and avoid?

Our potential and our dreams are impacted by all of these aspects as we climb our mountains in life. The partner we are tethered to can affect how we feel about ourselves and who we become. Just because you are divorced does not mean that either one of you must sacrifice your potential or your dreams. Divorce does not automatically imply that the active and/or the passive support for each other should stop. Like many other aspects of your relationship it just changes form.

The Divorce Mountain

Divorce transforms the marital mountain into the divorce mountain. Life is after all always one mountain after another.

When we stop placing limits on our thinking, on our potential, we will stop placing limits on our experiences.

The bad news is that the tether between you is still there especially if you have children together. Even if there are no children, you will always be tethered by the memories you share. (More about this in *Vow*

Twelve.) Fortunately, divorce can be more flexible than marriage, but only if you choose for it to be that way.

The legal tether that binds divorced parents together may include many rules. These are physical, logistical terms that your egos have to deal with. However, any remaining emotional or spiritual tether is of your own making, and there are only two guidelines to make this tether manageable and work for both of you:

1. You acknowledge the existence of the tether between you.
2. You do not use this tether against each other. It is not to be pulled on, manipulated, or used to throw your partner off his or her personal mountain.

Aside from these two guidelines, you can be tethered in a multitude of ways. It works best if you agree on the nature and feel of the tether between you, but that is not necessary for you to go on with your life and pursue your dreams. Your experience and how you feel about the tether might be different from your CIP's experience too.

If you both continue to approach the relationship from an ego-oriented perspective, then the tether has the potential to

become an obstacle you hold between you, and you will be more inclined to blame each other and the relationship for everything in your life that is not working. When you become more aware of your own ego-oriented behavior and recognize the value and benefit of the tether you share, especially as parents, then the tether and your experience of the relationship will work towards your higher good.

Revealing your ego in a divorce relationship is going to take some courage. Remember, egos can be very strong and are very good at hiding. Be patient with yourself and each other. On the surface egos come across as not liking it when they are revealed; yet, ironically, they keep doing things to show their hiding place. Egos act much the same way as a troubled child acting out in class. They desperately need attention even if it is negative attention in the form of punishment.

Egos also like making the tethers in our lives the albatrosses around our necks. It gets us off the hook. But when you reveal your ego and its true motives, it makes the ego's job of hiding, being right and surviving that much harder and it becomes easier for your spiritual side to gain control.

Do not be surprised if the feel of the tether changes, too, when you reveal your ego. You may find that exposing your ego through a divorce is more emotionally challenging than exposing it in marriage. It is not easy for the ego to redefine love for someone from whom you are separating. Divorce requires that you separate and let go, while paradoxically at the same time staying connected to one another. Divorce is actually a very spiritual exercise, but most people are not shown how to see it that way.

When you approach your divorce from a more spiritual perspective, and your spirit is able to call out your ego and confront it head on, the result is a calmness that overcomes you. You have one of those “aha” moments when the fog lifts and things become clearer and you feel as if a miracle has just occurred. You inwardly chuckle to yourself, “Oh, I get it now.” Shouldn’t this be the ultimate goal of any divorce?

Honoring the Space and Supporting the Potential

One of the reasons that divorce can be so painful is that the partners fail to understand what the divorce is really trying to accomplish. Divorce, like marriage, is about the space, the context between two partners. When a couple divorces, the parameters of the relationship have just been redefined. The tethers are still there, if not physically, then emotionally. Divorce provides the context for you to not only redefine your physical and spiritual relationship with your CIP, but also redefine the relationship you have with yourself. Make it your goal to use this space wisely and for your higher good.

Many divorced couples remain materially connected for many years and, during those years, continue to deal with their battling egos. One person may pay child support or alimony. The couple might own a house together or share a business. Health care, retirement, and college also come into play for some. These material connections are usually determined by how the legal process is navigated. If you are still materially connected to your CIP, whenever possible, apply the two guidelines stated on page 252 regarding how you are emotionally tethered to one another.

People who consciously or subconsciously undermine each other's dreams of fulfillment and accomplishment may inadvertently undermine their children's dreams too. Do not undermine your children's potential by continually sabotaging their mom's or dad's potential. Just like you, your children struggle with the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment of their dreams. Do not give them unnecessary weight to carry around as they set out on their own path.

Divorce is often experienced as a huge setback for people as they traverse life searching for happiness, fulfillment, and inner peace. It does not have to be that way. You need not allow divorce to be a lifelong obstacle that prevents you from being all you can be. Become a divorced person who is willing to say, *"We both screwed up,"* or, *"We both changed and grew in different directions,"* or, *"Things happened that we allowed to become bigger than our marriage. But I am going to see this as an opportunity and get on with my life and go after my dreams."*

The road of taking responsibility will more likely lead you toward your desired dreams, whatever they might be. If you hope to create an honest, nurturing, and loving relationship with someone else in the future, then be willing to extend this same hope to someone in your past, because blocking their path will ultimately only block your own.

Divorce is actually a very spiritual exercise, but most people are not shown how to see it that way.

Life is a journey. Our relationships are who we take along for the ride. Be a travel partner who cares about the happiness and potential of those on the journey with you.

Exercise 11: Take a Hike

This is a very simple exercise that is actually *exercise*. Go for a hike on a popular trail, in a park, or even down your street and take several plastic grocery bags with you. As you walk along, concentrate on finding any trash or dog mess. Try to notice even the smallest bits of debris, from every cigarette butt to every paper wrapper. Be as focused and as observant as you can. When you see any kind of mess, pick it up, put it in your bag, and realize how much better the spot looks now that you have taken the time to clean it up.

After fifteen or twenty minutes, find a trash can and deposit all that you have collected. Notice if you feel any better for cleaning up the space that you share with other people. That small part of your world is now cleaner because of your thoughts that you turned into actions. Derive some satisfaction from your effort.

Now, turn around and retrace your steps and continue on. This time you are to look for every bit of beauty and color around you, every life-form, every opportunity for joy, and every peaceful thing. For example, notice the beauty and color of flowers, the brilliance of fall leaves, the glisten of ice or snow reflecting from the sun, the smile and friendly greeting of a fellow walker, the warmth of the sun on your face, and the abundance of smells around you. Listen for

birds singing, or the sound of wind in the trees. Notice the rhythm of your own footsteps, the beating of your heart and the feel of air going into your lungs as you breathe. Be aware of anything and everything that reflects beauty, harmony, peace and joy. It is always there for the finding. It just depends on whether or not you are looking for it.

The walk you take both ways is the same one. It is the *exact* same path. What makes you miss the colors or the smell of the flowers or the sound of the birds or the wind in the trees the first leg of your walk? It is your focus. You will find what you were looking for, whether it is dog poop or a smiling face. This exercise clearly illustrates that your experience of the outside world starts inside you.

As you reflect on this exercise, try and walk about life with the same awareness. Notice small things you could do to clean up your environment. Really look at things that you find beautiful. When it's appropriate, clean up the mess on your path, but as soon as you can, look for the flower hiding amongst the weeds. What you find and dwell on is totally your choice. Are you pursuing happiness and success and seeing all that is good around you or are you focusing on the mess that others leave behind?



Divorce Vows

Notes

Vow Twelve



*I will acknowledge that part of me came
from my experience of being part of you.
I will not forget that we have shared memories.*

*Forever is a long time from now, and
yet **now** is when it starts.*

Vow Twelve: Shared Memories

V*ow Twelve* is the exclamation point to the book. It recaps the theme that we have certain relationships in our lives for a reason. These special relationships will forever be a part of us and that forever starts now!

We are not just individual, separate beings running around, stumbling over, interacting with, and crashing into each other. We share a deep connectedness with one another that is not readily apparent in everyday life, but we are connected all the same. Our relationships hold the mystery as to why we are here.

Behind the mystery to our existence we find love. “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful.” Oh, how we wish that these famous words from 1 Corinthians 13:4 could always be the way love is for us! Too often, though, our experience of love is very different—or at least the ego’s experience of it is. The love that the ego experiences appears to take on many forms and it is not always a pleasant experience.

Sometimes love seems to be a demanding and tough ruler that has taken control over our lives. It has a competitive side that can turn arrogant and pushy—anything but patient. It is also messy at times and horribly complicated. The euphoria you feel when love touches you can make the whole world seem surreal. And yet, when that same love seems to change or disappear, the pain you experience can cut into the pit of your soul. For some couples, the joy of love inexplicably disintegrates right before their eyes and life becomes full of misery and desperation.

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Each of us can be thought of as a unique vehicle for the expression of love. We are like different musical instruments with different interpretations of the same tune. Sometimes we are in harmony with one another and the song we play together feels melodic and moving. At other times, the song sounds off-key and discordant. The song of another can become stuck in our head or our heart because it has moved us, and we may be unable to easily forget it or let it go.

You, too, probably have had the experience of not hearing a song for years or even decades, and yet when you heard it again, the lyrics and melody returned like a long lost friend. Love is often much like that, resonating with its own unique vibration that easily comes to mind and can still move us no matter the time that has past.

Our most intimate relationships, such as those with our parents, spouses and children, are imprinted in us like songs on our hearts. These are the relationships that can inspire us to become more than we ever thought possible, or can drive us to the point of self-destruction. Sometimes the intensity of love is too great and the burden becomes too heavy. Exhausted, our only desire is to escape its lash and the resulting pain. This pain is the flip side to love's sweet pleasures. As hard as our egos try to run and hide from the pain, love will always search for us and, ultimately, it will find us, if only in our memories.

Memories Remain

You cannot completely divorce yourself from the memories that you share with others, especially those people in your life who

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know you intimately. When physically separated, you merely lose one access point to those memories, not the memories themselves. For some couples, one of the hardest things to cope with after a physical divorce is the realization that they each have lost access to shared experiences that evoke powerful memories.

The same thing happens when death separates a couple. A spouse can remember things about their partner's life that they may have forgotten or repressed. If you have divorced and feel as if you have lost part of your mind, in some ways you have. Not only does the physical separation cause you to lose access to memories, you may not be able to retrieve parts of the past because you have also divorced yourself from the part that you knew as "us." The memories are still there. Some paths to them have just been severed.

For those who share children, but no longer marriage, there is one connection that will never be severed. As has been said many times, you will always be connected to your CIP through your children. You may not speak to the mother or father of your children for twenty years, but your children will still think of the two of you as Mom and Dad.

You can try to divorce yourself from your memories and suppress your feelings, but they will always be part of you. When you hear a song from the time you were "in love," memories of where you were, what you were doing, and how you felt might readily emerge. All of our relationships are never farther than a thought away.

It may be unsettling to think that your feelings about your relationships might still be only a whisper of a memory away,

especially if you just wish to move on from a particularly painful relationship. Unfortunately, neither the brain nor the heart work that way. There is no delete button you can push to erase your experiences. Those imprints on your life are here to stay.

This same phenomenon manifests itself on a physical level with regards to the body. For instance, a person who has lost a

Each of us can be thought of as a unique vehicle for the expression of love.

leg will have phantom feelings that are indicative of a functioning limb. What was once neurologically defined as the *end of a limb* can still feel pain, relative heat, or even an itch.

The brain is sending and receiving messages to and from the end of the leg—the long lost foot. The brain cannot distinguish that the end point has changed. It still *feels* the foot.

If this can happen on a physical level, could you not experience the same phenomenon on an emotional, psychological or spiritual level? Even though you have literally cut off something that was the trigger of certain emotions, aren't you still left with a semblance of emotional nerve endings that need to be recognized?

Remember, each person is like a chemical compound comprised of his or her life's experiences. An intimate relationship, such as a marriage, is like the combining of two of these distinct chemical compounds. The resultant reaction transforms the two entities forever.

Divorce is often an attempt to reverse this process, but the truth is that the original compounds—the individuals as they

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once were—cannot be recovered because both have been permanently altered through their interactions with the other. The genie of shared experience and life lessons has forever changed each person and the original person cannot be put back in the bottle. We need not like these changes or the life lessons, but they are often given to us to learn from whether we ask for them or not. Who would willingly ask to fall in love with someone if they knew the result would be the pain of a broken heart?

It may seem cruel and an unlucky twist of fate to fall in love with a person who is going to hurt us, but fair or not, life's pain, just like its joys, is always going to be part of the process as we evolve. Take for instance the twist of fate of the path of a tornado. A tornado can pass over houses and leave one completely intact while destroying its neighbor. The path of this life force does not seem to follow rhyme or reason. Is this accidental, or is there purpose and design behind what appears to be random? Likewise, could there also be a hidden purpose, some grander design behind the pain we feel in a destructive, tumultuous relationship?

Relationships Serve a Higher Purpose

How different our life experiences would be if we saw our lives as fact finding missions and each moment as full of clues. How different our relationships would be, too, if we saw every relationship as serving a greater purpose. It has been said that we attract what we feel. If this is true, then it suggests that we can

attract more positive experiences in our lives by simply feeling more positive about what we already have.

The popular bestselling book and DVD, *The Secret*, by Rhoda Byrne, expounds on this premise. It suggests that we do indeed reap what we sow; like a boomerang, we get back what we send out. This relates to the concept of karma, that life has a way of eventually balancing the scale. What does your intuition tell you about karma? Do we get back what we put out? Is life really unfair or might it make perfect sense if we could only see the bigger picture? Where do feelings of gratitude and forgiveness fit in? Can positive and grateful thinking really change the future?

You may not agree with the premise that our relationships all serve a higher purpose. Your life might be rife with bad experiences and difficult relationships. However, whether or not you see the people in your life as being in your life for a reason, they will still remain a part of your life, at least in memory.

Imagine, though, the possibilities if you looked at every one of your relationships, especially your close ones, as valuable contributions to your life, no matter the outcome. It does not matter whether you believe in an overarching grand design. At any moment *you* can decide what a relationship means to you and how you want it to contribute to your life. Wouldn't your relationships become much more satisfying and enriching? Even the painful ones might seem more bearable if you saw them as having a higher purpose and there for a reason.

You may be unable to convince your CIP that all relationships have a cause and effect element to them and operate at the

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level of a higher purpose, yours included. They may not be ready for the idea that you are in each other's lives to learn lessons. When lessons are learned we begin to heal. Your CIP may not be ready to learn; therefore, they may not be ready to heal. However, that need not prevent you from learning your lessons and healing yourself.

How different our relationships would be, too, if we saw every relationship as serving a greater purpose.

To help illustrate this idea better, think back to any past, meaningful relationship you had in your life. What were some of the lessons you learned from it, or how do you think it changed you? As you reflect back on it with a spiritual perspective, does it seem possible that whatever you experienced, whether pleasant or painful, was utterly appropriate for you at that precise time in your life? Aren't you stronger for the experience?

For instance, if forgiveness is hard for you to offer, did life seem to give you an abundance of people who did things that required your forgiveness? If you were to see these people as an opportunity to learn how to be more forgiving, would you not also experience healing at some level—some growth and evolvment? You would have experienced none of this—the pain nor the healing—without these people in your life. This is one example of raising your level of *relationship consciousness* and gaining 20/20 hindsight vision. If you were able and willing to be this reflective with all of your relationships, how do you think it would change your feelings about them?

Taken a step further, can you consider the possibility that if you changed what you are feeling, you might attract something different, and perhaps better, into your life . . . perhaps a healthier and more nurturing relationship? This is complicated stuff. It can be unnerving and uncomfortable, but no more unnerving and uncomfortable for your heart than living with a troubled relationship following you around, pestering you like an unacknowledged ghost. A better recourse may be to bring out the spiritual cavalry and solicit your higher self's wisdom. Allow your spirit to confront the ghost of "a relationship past" and see what your spirit can accomplish.

Choosing to be More Conscious

The important thing to know is that you can choose, at any moment, to make more conscious connections between your actions, your feelings, and their subsequent consequences. Of course, taking a more conscious approach to any relationship can be challenging and asking yourself soul-level questions about your marriage can be an intimidating assignment, especially if the relationship was or still is dysfunctional, abusive, or filled with bad outcomes.

You may find it helpful to get the assistance and guidance of a good therapist, counselor, or close friend to help you with the process and gain new insights. This book only scratches the surface as you start spiritually digging into who you are, where you have been and where you are going. Fresh insights and the right questions may help guide you through the maze of your experiences and feelings.

The right questions often lead to the answers that bring a sense of clarity, closure and peace.

However, do not let the questions you pose to yourself drive you crazy. It may take time to find the answers to some of your deep-seated soul questions. When the timing is right and you are ready, trust that the answers will come to you. You cannot force closure before its time. What you can do is be better prepared when the time is right.

Knowing who you are at a deeper level of your being will help you determine an appropriate direction for this time in your life. And when you are heading in the right direction, the game of life and all of your relationships become more joyful as you uncover more of life's clues.

No matter what your relationship was like or who you were married to, they will remain a part of who you are and the two of you will always share a piece of one another's lives. Whatever happened, you are truly wiser for the experience. Our relationships are filled with blessings—some of them blessings disguised as pain.

Sometimes our friends and our enemies are one in the same. Everyone you meet is a partner on your journey and it is up to you to value their contributions to your life. At the deepest level you already know this...and that is spiritual wisdom at its best. Now that you have finished the book use what you can to discover how your spirit can guide you in being who you really want to be. This is ultimately, for all of us, the path to peace.

**Exercise 12A:
My Divorce Vows
(For divorced readers)**

Now that you have finished the book, you might want to start customizing some of the ideas to fit your particular relationship and circumstance. This is your opportunity to write your own *Divorce Vows* to apply to your relationship after the decree. You can be as specific or as general as you want. You can refer back to the mission statement you wrote in *Vow Four* or any of the questions posed in the book to refresh your memory on which ideas were important to you. Complete the following sentences.

1. I will remember _____ .
I will not turn our relationship into _____ .
2. I will notice _____ .
I will not discount _____ .
3. I will accept _____ .
I will not hold onto _____ .
4. I will communicate with you with _____ .
I will not lie or be deceitful about _____ .

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5. I will forgive _____ .
I will not forget that I learned _____ .
6. I will be thankful for _____ .
I will not emphasize _____ .
7. I will be a constructive person by _____ .
I will not be destructive by _____ .
8. I will create a positive environment by _____ .
I will not keep company with _____ .
9. I will be a team player by _____ .
I will not create sides by _____ .
10. I will support our extended relationships by _____ .
I will not prevent our children from _____ .
11. I will respect and support you in _____ .
I will not obstruct your happiness by _____ .
12. I will acknowledge that our relationship _____ .
I will not forget that we share _____ .

Continued on next page

Exercise 12B:
A Near-Divorce Experience
(for not yet divorced readers)

Your relationship went through “cardiac arrest” and you fear that it has expired. At least for now, you have flat-lined. Suddenly, you find yourself at the pearly gates of heaven and Saint Peter greets you with a warm but stern look on his face. His piercing, but wise and kind eyes meet yours.

“Your relationship has been declared dead,” he says, “but I am inclined to send you back because you have unfinished business. Before you can pass through these gates, you must go back and work on the goals that you were destined to accomplish. When you have finished your work, come back and see me. In the meantime, God speed, as you fulfill His desires for your life.”

This is an opportunity for you to write down your own *Relationship Vows* that might more aptly fit your present relationship and save your marriage. You may use the beginning vows of the previous exercise or come up with your own topics. The life of your relationship and your peace of mind are what’s at stake. Do not let your relationship expire prematurely or your peace of mind to wander aimlessly like a lost soul seeking rest and solace.



Afterword



Afterword

This book has already been an amazing journey for me. I came up with the original idea more than a decade ago, and I played around with it for a number of years. Then about four years ago various parts of my life started to converge. Motivated by some indescribable yearning, I began to put the pieces together and started to write. At the beginning I did not know why I was feeling so compelled to write or where my written words would take me. I just felt like I was doing what I was “supposed” to be doing. I felt like I had come home when I sat down to write.

Throughout this whole process I have worked on my marriage, been a mother to my three children, struggled at being a step-parent to three adult children and a step-grandmother too. Ideas would come to me seemingly out of the blue and from any corner of my world. There were many times that I took my laptop or notebook with me as I went about my daily life as a mom of three busy children. I spent hours in parking lots and waiting rooms, auditoriums and bleachers, washing dishes and folding laundry, all the while thinking and writing away. It has culminated over these past four years and finally it is time for this book to be born.

Writing and publishing a book truly is like giving birth. And once you give birth to a book, just like a child, it will grow and travel where it is destined to go. This book’s ultimate purpose and destiny is yet to be known. Where it will take me

is yet to be determined. Just writing it and crossing paths with people who have shown up to help me, have given me invaluable lessons already and just for that, it has been a personally enlightening experience.

One thing I am sure of is that just writing this book changed my life. I got to delve into the depths of my inner being and explore aspects of me that I had never experienced before. This book will forever be a reminder to myself of who I want to be in my relationships. I can never return to the person I was before I wrote the book and each day it challenges me to keep looking deeper. Just know that I struggle and work on each one of these *Vows* in my marriage. I also use them as I deal with many of my other relationships, including the relationship I have with myself. More often than I would like to admit I forget or I am unable to be who I really want to be and the book is my own personal guidebook to keep me on track.

I want to leave you now with one last message. When I was a child growing up, we attended Westminster Presbyterian Church in Oklahoma City. The church is red-bricked, complete with a stately white steeple and tower bells. It has a beautiful sanctuary with massive, white ornate columns that line the sides, high arched ceilings, and a mammoth pipe organ located in the vestibule. My mother liked to sit in the balcony, so many of my memories of going to church are of experiencing church from the perspective of this grand view.

What I remember most about sitting up there was the end of the service. During the last hymn, the choir would weave down the maroon carpeted aisle, all dressed in their robes, and followed by the minister. Their voices and the pipe organ would

Afterword

be so loud I would literally feel the vibrations in my body as the music and words reverberated throughout the sanctuary. At the very end of the service, the minister would stand right below me at the back of the sanctuary. As I leaned over the balcony railing I would hear him bellow out his benediction with his hands raised up, willing his words upon us. The words of his benediction have been etched in my memory for over forty years and I think it fitting to end this book with them.

*Go forth in the world in peace.
Be of good courage.
Hold fast to that which is good.
Render to no man evil for evil.
Strengthen the fainthearted,
Support the weak,
Help the afflicted.
Honor all men.
Love and serve the Lord
With all your heart
With all your soul and
With all your mind.
Rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.
May the grace of God
And the fellowship of the living Christ
Be with you all.*

Amen!

About the book... about the author



Divorce Vows—*A New Approach* is a guideline that shows how to create a healthy relationship and nurturing family environment, even during the stressful times of divorce. Beginning over a decade ago Edie wrote down thoughts and ideas based on her own observations, life experiences and what she experienced to be helpful to her and her husband in sustaining a successful marriage. Her main goal and motivation in turning her notes into a book was to share with others how to have a spiritual perspective towards all your relationships. She tailored her ideas into *Vows* written specifically for those people who are dealing with divorce because she felt that it is during times of great pain and sorrow when people need the most loving perspective to see them through, to help them heal and to encourage them to grow from their experience. *Divorce*

Divorce Vows

Vows—A New Approach does just that. It presents a whole new way of looking at our relationships.

Eddie was born and raised in Oklahoma City, the youngest of four children. Eddie and her husband, Rich, were married in 1986. They have three teenage children, Sallie, Sophia and Spencer. She helped raise her three step-children, Rich, Jr., Laura and David, during their teenage years and she also has three step-grandchildren.

Since her early 20s Eddie has had a passion for observing and understanding what makes relationships work or don't work. As part of her learning process she became certified in divorce mediation. She put what she learned into practice in her own life and family relationships and has been listening to and counseling people all her adult life.

Eddie and her family live in the beautiful town of Loveland, Colorado, nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. She continues to be a full time mom raising three active and amazing teenagers. She is an avid reader, enjoys watching sports and good movies, loves to cook with her husband and walk her two Golden Retrievers, Daisy and Boomer.

For contact information, workshop schedules and speaking engagements go to her website:

www.DivorceVows.com