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LUST *for*
LOVE

Rekindling Intimacy and Passion in your Relationship

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CHAPTER 1

The Art of Intimacy

This art of love discloses the special and sacred identity of the other person. Love is the only light that can truly read the secret signature of the other person's individuality and soul. Love alone is literate in the world of origin; it can decipher identity and destiny.

JOHN O'DONOHUE

Oscar Wilde once wrote, “One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry.” We believe he’s wrong. We believe intimacy isn’t lost in marriage. We believe passionate, romantic love can exist within a long-term relationship, lasting years after the echoes of wedding bells fade. We reject the belief that we have to put off marriage or reject monogamy altogether to have exciting, passionate, toe-curling sex.

The notion of marriage being the death of Eros is one that is foreign to our thinking. Marriage is where sex flourishes—or at least it should. The real death of sex is caused by a culture that has rejected the foundations of intimacy that fuel passion—emotional and spiritual connection, subjective knowledge of another human being, and sexual restraint that builds

anticipation—choosing instead mechanical detachment, objectification, and immediate gratification.

Pamela

One of my favorite writers, essayist Anaïs Nin, once said people don't know how to make love, to discover the artistry of intimacy, because in their "microscopic examination of sexual activity" they exclude important aspects of intimacy that are the necessary fuel to ignite it. "This is what gives sex its surprising textures, its subtle transformations, its aphrodisiac elements," she writes. When you don't have it, "you are shrinking your world of sensations. You are withering it, starving it, draining its blood." Instead, we need to find the source of sexual power, which is curiosity and passion. When you don't nourish it, "you're watching its little flame die of asphyxiation. Sex does not thrive on monotony."¹ Sex can't survive without passion and intimacy.

An erotic relationship flourishes when there's curiosity and familiarity, passion and emotional connection, fantasy and realism. A key way to hold these apparent contradictions together is by practicing the principles of eroticism: unavailability, mystery, forbiddenness, and vertical discovery. When these are woven into a relationship, a vibrant life full of passion and intimacy is the result.

Overfamiliarity can kill passion, but this can be avoided by putting some healthy distance into the relationship. Unavailability generates frustrated desire—that hunger you feel when you're first getting to know each other. You long for your lover's kiss, to see his body, to discover how he feels against you, but you can't always have him. He's just beyond your reach. It might seem like unavailability would be impossible in a marriage, but it isn't. That hunger you once felt can be experienced again and again.

Mystery injects a sense of curiosity and novelty into the relationship.

You don't know everything about this person you've fallen in love with; there's still so much to discover, something new and amazing. You always want to know more about him, but he's not easily understood or readily available. He remains a mystery to unravel. This attracts you, keeping your interest alive.

In the same way, forbiddenness adds another layer of excitement by injecting a little naughtiness into the relationship. Let's admit it, sin is exciting. Wanting something you can't have gets your heart beating, your skin flushed, your mind racing. This fuels passion. Marriage seems to close the door on this possibility because it's completely legal—there's nothing forbidden about marriage, nothing sinful. But this element can still be injected into the relationship in little ways that feed eroticism.

The final principle—vertical discovery—is essential to both intimacy and passion. Vertical renewal is when we plumb the depths of another, taking the time to know them, discovering what they really like, learning new interests and passions, getting to know them at deeper and deeper levels as we explore their body and mind. We become bored with one another when we think we know all there is to know, but human beings are multifaceted, especially if we develop ourselves individually to become more interesting and to experience more of life. The person you're married to should never become a bore, and they won't if you both take the time to discover new and wondrous things about each other. Penetrate those depths. Peel back the layers. This can be deeply erotic and inflame passion as you lead one another down new paths, share new insights, and learn new perspectives. This lust for knowledge, for understanding, for life is a lust for love when shared by two people who intimately and continually discover each other.

Living a life of passionate connectedness is not theoretical. We've seen it. We've experienced the joy of it. We've met couples who embody these principles.

RABBI SHMULEY

I have counseled many men and women and have known a couple for years who live according to these principles. Their marriage is a shining example of lasting love and intimacy. Mike and Sue's relationship is based on total honesty. They have a sensual and sexual openness that they've worked on for many years. They can have erotic conversations with each other about fantasy, sexual desire, and sensual needs without conflict because they've pushed beyond inhibitions.

You would think this would be natural for a married couple, but it isn't. Many couples live closed off from each other, often afraid to be vulnerable with the other, sexually and emotionally. This erodes passion and love over time. Mike and Sue have overcome those fears even to the point that Mike can listen to his wife's fantasies about him and others without getting hurt. He learns from her so he can be a better lover and husband. He sees this sharing as an expansion of his wife's desire. He admits it's slightly threatening to him, but he can get past it because he knows her honesty makes them closer.

Even after several years of marriage, their sex life is strong and sensual. They don't do a lot of quickies, but spend time with each other, seeking vertical renewal. Sue doesn't exist to satisfy Mike's urges. They engage in kissing and giving each other massages. This doesn't always lead to intercourse; sometimes just touching is enough. In fact, delayed gratification makes things much more exciting to them, and they have no problem stoking the fires of desire and saving the best parts for later. There's a romantic build-up that connects them through sensuality, sound, scent, and touch.

Sex is important in their relationship, but it isn't everything, of course. It's not the apex of their relationship. They also engage in

constant romantic activity, not mushy things like buying flowers and gifts. Their romance is integrated into their daily lives because they're about being, not just doing. They know how to be present with each other, sharing their thoughts and feelings throughout the day, taking walks, and having a sense of oneness in everything they do. They haven't lost their sense of individuality, but they are two people who comprise a larger whole because they share their hopes and dreams. They laugh a lot, and when they hurt each other they ask for forgiveness. When they've inflicted pain, they acknowledge it; they don't deny or ignore it. They heal the wound and bridge the gap that has been created by their own thoughtlessness. This keeps bitterness from building. They don't have to be burdened with constantly educating each other about what hurts them. They see it on their own, and they fix it.

They're also very loving parents. Their love isn't exclusive, focused only on them. It's shared. Friendship is important, and children are important. They know the balance of being parents and a couple. A loving, erotic relationship doesn't mean they need to cut themselves off from the world. They stay communally engaged, and this enriches their relationship because it stimulates and improves them as individuals. They don't live in isolation from the world, their children, or each other. These intimate connections and their intersections in their lives make their relationship vibrant, full of life and love.

When Mike and Sue are together, there is a deep respect between them. Sue is a very feminine woman, and there's a quiet dignity to her. She can command the conversation at the table with a certain feminine subtlety. It's obvious that there's so much depth to her, and Mike finds her endlessly interesting. He feels privileged to be with a woman as developed as she is. There is an ease of comfort between them. It's not forced, and it's not showy. It's small

gestures. He defers to her and is a little in awe of her. She never engages in emasculation toward him. No little digs directed his way. Certainly no eye rolling. She respects him and believes she is married to a good man. She tells him this constantly. This mutual respect enhances their love.

More than anything else, their relationship is a blessing to others. Their friends and extended family are blessed, and their children are blessed, because they too want to get married just like their parents. They want to have the kind of intimate relationship their parents have. They don't want just cheap, unimaginative sex. They want lifelong partners. They see that their parents' marriage is passionate and intimate, and they want the same.

This is the kind of relationship many people want but don't have. They want that intimate connection with passionate sex. They want a full life shared with the one person who completes them. Some have experienced it briefly, but they haven't been able to sustain it, and its memory hangs in their heart forever as they long for more than just a familiar face sleeping on the other side of the bed.

Pamela

I've also experienced this kind of relationship, and know how satisfying and enriching it is. It was a special bond I will always treasure. There were other romances before that, but none compared with that relationship. In those other relationships, there was room for self-consciousness and doubt. I'd ask, "Is this love?" and not really know the answer. This relationship was different. There were no doubts, no reservations, no second-guessing. The two of us were more comfortable with each other than on our own. Everything flowed from an immediate mutual recognition, a sense of being in step, not just physically but psychologically too.

Everything felt as if it had been lined up perfectly: our sense of humor, our rhythms, our sudden passion for each other, our easy exchange of affection and warmth. Maybe this is why poets compare love to the alignment of stars. He knew, without knowing, how to complement me, how to make me feel safe and happy with myself, and I knew how to do the same for him. It was like a dance that had taken off, suddenly no longer merely following the steps or going through the motions, but now a force of its own that felt right and natural.

I realized that all that had come before had been learning the steps for this relationship. And I also knew that, like a dance, it was something that required commitment from both of us, something we would need to maintain together if it was to continue.

Not all such relationships last, and often the loss of love like this is part of the learning experience too. But when I hear people express skepticism about the possibility of real love in the twenty-first century, I remember that love and how it was once just right, and I know: it is possible. More than that, it's necessary.