
LOVING SOBER



A
field guide to
true spiritual intimacy

JAY STINNETT

INTRODUCTION

After 20 years of consciously being on a spiritual path, I found myself confronted with a crisis in my second marriage that seemed insurmountable. It was about finances *again*. It was about violating my wife's trust *again*. It was about my wife being unable to talk about finances unemotionally *again*. It was about feeling alone and desperate to solve something that neither my wife nor I was equipped to solve *again*.

Up to that point, I had believed that if I were just more spiritual and applied myself harder, everything would work out. When my wife left town for six weeks, I realized that perhaps that was not true. I was frightened. When my wife returned, I told her, against my better judgement, that I would do anything she wanted to make things right.

She immediately suggested we enroll in "Relationship 101," the work upon which this book is based.

In just 12 short weeks, we were given the tools which gradually, as my wife and I learned to apply them, liberated us from painful repetitive emotional upheavals -- we referred to it as the *Karmic Dance* -- that we experienced every 6 to 12 weeks.

The ensuing 12 years have been filled with the development of an intimacy that I never thought possible in my home.

Loving Sober™ is a method of creating a new dynamic in a relationship between couples dedicated to each other, who after trying other methods, find they have not resulted in sustainable change.

This teaching does not seek to resolve past hurts, it creates a new foundation for mutual support based in spirit.

Loving Sober™ is not a magic bullet; it is a recipe. Each ingredient builds upon the previous one. The results are directly proportional to the sincerity and effort applied.

It is as helpful to couples newly together on the spiritual path as it is for people who have been sharing their lives for many years.

Loving Sober™ is an outgrowth of the "Relationship 101" classes taught at Leelaa, in Hermosa Beach, CA by Lee Scantlin.

The 10 Non-Negotiables were originally brought to him by Barbara Mary Muhl, a student of Joel Goldsmith and an Infinite Way teacher.

Loving Sober™ is based on audios of classes where Barbara presented the 10 Non-Negotiables to a group of her students. I am forever indebted to her for blazing this path.

Much of the material presented here was written by Lee Scantlin. He granted permission to use and alter the content as guided.

Preface

This book contains the core teachings of Loving Sober™. If you would like to further explore this process, audios, videos, retreats, classes and further illustrations and information about individualized 12-week programs, are available at www.lovingsober.com

“Loving Sober™” iBook is available free to anyone who wishes to improve his or her primary relationship. No part of this book may be copied or posted without permission of the author. Through your donations, others will have the opportunity to learn this transformational practice.

Donations to Loving Sober™ are gratefully accepted. Through your gifts, others will have the opportunity to learn this transformational practice. You can make a contribution of any amount at www.lovingsober.com/donate

Jay Stinnett has led more than 50 retreats and relationship workshops for men, women and couples throughout the US and Europe. He has also given spiritually-based presentations to thousands worldwide.

Loving Sober™ is the result of more than 30 years of intensive work with others in personal transformation.

The work provided in the Loving Sober™ Program is Conscious Relationship Guidance. Jay Stinnett is not a doctor or therapist, nor does this guidance have any psychoanalytical basis.

Though it is helpful to have a foundation in a 12-step program, it is not necessary, nor is this in any way 12 step work or affiliated with any 12 step program.

Jay Stinnett is based in Redondo Beach, CA , working with couples and groups worldwide via conference call, Skype or Facetime. If you would like Jay to privately guide you through Loving Sober’s 12 week program, facilitate a weekend or week long Loving Sober™ retreat for your group, or speak at your event, please contact him at jay@lovingsober.com

Forward

A Marriage Transformed

10 Non-Negotiables

My husband and I have been in and out of couples counseling for our entire 20 year relationship. We've been on the verge of divorce twice – with the second divorce decision coming on the heels of living under separate roofs for six months. It's never been about a lack of love – we love each other tremendously. We are kind, thoughtful, hard-working people, but somehow our marriage couldn't survive despite contracting with five different couples therapists. No one could accuse us of a lack of trying. When we told our therapist that we had decided to divorce, she said she'd never seen a couple work harder than we did. And we knew and felt that to be true. It was a few months after we had made that decision that Jay guided us through the 10 Non-Negotiables practice. My husband and I were open to it because we have a young daughter and it was important to us to be loving partners in raising her despite the pending divorce. Our only thought in entering into the practice with Jay was to be in a loving, spiritual adult relationship with each other. Twelve weeks later we had discovered a new intimacy, a new way of communicating, and a pragmatic set of actions that allowed us to be the partners we had dreamed of being. It's been a painful, joyful and enlightening practice and one that we continue to engage in daily as a married couple.

The 10 Non-Negotiables were instrumental in helping us to reconcile even though that was not the goal. I've learned to apply the Non-Negotiables to all of my primary relationships and my life has become a much more peaceful, happy existence. I still believe in the value of a good therapist to help, especially in crisis situations, but Jay's book is not about therapy – it's about loving conscious pragmatic behavior. I encourage everyone who is in a relationship to read this book and engage in the practice – these are vibrant, effective tools that can be learned and will impact all your relationships in a loving, positive way.

Laverne McKimmon

Former Loving Sober™ Client

SECTION 2

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Dedication

It is impossible to convey the gratitude owed my mentor Lee Scantlin he has literally raised loving consciousness worldwide from Leelaa in Hermosa Beach, CA



Jay Stinnett Adell Shay Lee Scantlin

This work is lovingly dedicated to Adell Shay, my muse, my mirror,
the love of a thousand lifetimes

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Love begets love.

It is impossible to thank everyone who has brought this teaching to it's current fruition , but...

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The Differences Between Therapy and Conscious Relationship Guidance

Therapy	Conscious Relationship Guidance
Assumes the client needs healing	Assumes the client is whole
Roots in medicine, psychiatry	Roots in the world's great spiritual traditions
Works with people to achieve self-understanding and emotional healing	Works to move people to a higher level of consciousness
Focuses on feelings and past events	Focuses on loving actions
Explores the root of problems	Explores solutions
Brings the unconscious into the intellect	Brings honest, compassionate communication into relationships
Provides understanding of internal pain and old patterns.	Provides spiritual solutions to achieve lasting intimacy.

Relationships

Relationships

“Straightening ourselves out spiritually begins by straightening out our human relationships. Relationships are what living is all about. We want to learn to live in harmony, with understanding and fulfillment.”

~ *Barbara Mary Muhl*

Loving Sober™ is about relationships between well-intentioned adults. It is designed for loving couples who are frustrated and want to start enjoying the love that they feel they have lost. They have tried other methods and now are seeking a spiritual solution to their relationship challenges.

Your relationship will succeed or fail because of your *behaviors*. The 10 Non-Negotiable's list 10 behaviors that are destructive to relationships. These are paired with constructive behaviors that will accomplish what the destructive behaviors intended, but failed to achieve.

The 10 Non-Negotiables are a contract that ensures a joyful, respectful, mutually supportive, and spiritually fulfilling relationship between two adults. It is suggested that you contract with your significant other to stop all 10 destructive

behaviors, replacing them with constructive ones that are critical for a successful relationship.

This work is about behaviors. It does not address anyone's thoughts.

Loving Sober™

Loving Sober is designed to help couples of good will become aware of the extent to which they engage in behaviors that are destructive to their relationship and to provide practical spiritual tools designed to enhance relationships.

Loving Sober is a spiritual experiment, each element must be applied, not agreed with. Exercise requires effort; in order to reboot your love, a minimum of thirty minutes a day is required. Daily periods of mediation and communication, along with the mid-week meeting are the foundation of this process, without which there will be no change. This process is sequential; each week's experience informs the next.

Every week, one Non-Negotiable will be introduced, shining clarity on which of the types of relationship behaviors are constructive and which, destructive. The week's practice

invites participants to identify times when destructive behaviors are used and apply alternate behaviors instead.

Each week, half of the session will be spent candidly discussing each participant's experiences from the preceding week. This review is a very important part of the process. Sharing insights helps one see how ingrained and impersonal the destructive (habitual) patterns are and allows immediate realization of the benefits of applying the new.

With each non-negotiable, there is an both a real life example and a weekly practice. The chapter examples show the how applying the principles of this teaching liberates relationships from repetitive painful eruptions they illustrate - referred to as the *Karmic Dance*.

In many examples, there is reference to "the story" that the partners tell themselves prior to engaging in destructive behaviors. You are encouraged to do the same - begin to notice what mental dialog chatters right before engaging in an emotional reaction. **When the dialog is noticed, simply witness it.** The dialog often begins with "I'll always or never." Example: "I'll never do enough, I'll always be controlled, I'll never be valued, I'll never be believed, etc."

This dialog constructs stories each of us tell ourselves about what is happening or is about to happen. Although these stories *feel* personal, they are not - they are simply lies of human consciousness - they did not originate in the current

relationship. They are an overlay from the past reminding us of a painful event that is being projected into the present or future. Typically, we resist the story we are superimposing onto a situation by exerting an opposite behavior. For example, if we believe we are being controlled, we might rebel. When in actuality, what we are rebelling against is either a memory or a projection. Thus, changing one's partner will not eliminate them. These stories need to be addressed by each individual.

The weekly "Non-Negotiable Practice" is not optional; it is **essential**. Each provides the framework for viewing the weekly experience.

This teaching is also about developing true communication skills, which requires a daily practice of meditation with your partner, beginning with a minimum of five minutes per day. By opening to Consciousness together, daily, we begin to release our partner from the deeply grooved behaviors that locked us in a *Karmic Dance* of frustration, anger and remorse and prevented us from enjoying the love we have always desired.

Next, it is important that partners agree that they will help each other become aware of their behaviors *without* accusation. Partners must learn to lovingly identify each other's shortcomings in a constructive manner. The development of this skill is **vital** to the experience of a successfully changed relationship.

It is also **vital** that a regularly scheduled mid-week meeting be held to allow partners to share insights on their own behavior and its impact on the relationship dynamic. It's critical that this be done in non-confrontational manner. Remember, every awareness brings you closer. It is necessary to clarify your experience by sharing about your behavior while supporting your partner's insights about him or herself.

Loving Sober is a 12 week experiment. Open your hearts and minds and see!

Response vs. Reaction

How to Get a Response vs. Reaction

How we communicate is as important as what we communicate. When discussing and sharing insights at the mid-week meeting and throughout the week, use the following method.

NOTE: This method is effective in **all** forms of adult communication and is a core element of this teaching. You will be delighted at the results in the workplace as well as at home.

1. Begin with two positive statements.
2. Follow them with your “view.”
3. Finish with another positive.

For example, something like this:

“You really work hard providing for our family, and I appreciate all you do around the house, especially when you clean the bathroom.

Yesterday, when I went to take a bath, the tub was dirty. I’m sure it was an oversight but would you please clean it for us?

Everything else was great and I’m so lucky to be with you.”

How to respond without reacting:

Listen carefully and let the viewpoint enter. It might be valid. e.g. “I don’t see it, but I’ll entertain it as a possibility.”

2. If, upon letting it enter, it finds no resting place, you can say, “That’s not my experience.”

To resolve a misunderstanding, adults of good will need to come a meeting of the minds. As long as you are calm and no emotion is experienced (see “Feelings vs. Emotions”), discuss the issue. If emotion is experienced, table the discussion and then revisit it when no emotion is present.

Feelings vs. Emotions

Feelings vs. Emotions

It is useful to distinguish between feelings and emotions in this work as part of acquiring a precise shared vocabulary. Feelings are simply what we feel. Emotions are feelings *plus* the dialog going on in our heads about the feeling. It is “our story.”

For example, being hurt is a feeling. Suffering is an emotion; a dialog has been added (“I can’t believe this is happening again” or “He promised to never speak to me like that” or “She said she had forgiven me, but always brings it up.”)

What we feel is what’s real about us at any given moment. There is no running dialog attached. Feelings are not destructive. Feelings change. We never have to justify our feelings.

If we are to learn to love fearlessly, feelings must be expressed. A relationship cannot thrive without it. Expressing your feelings, a skill you will develop in Loving Sober™, is an integral part of partnership communication.

Emotions are conditioned, based on old conclusions and previous experiences. If we’re having an emotion, we’re exhibiting a conditioned response. Emotions are always destructive. **Emotions should NEVER be expressed.**

We don’t have the right to subject anyone to them as they are a lie in our consciousness. There are no valid emotions. We are the victims of our own emotions.

Emotions are usually a result of our not accepting responsibility - of **blaming** someone else for the way we filter/perceive an event, the story we attach to it, and the way we react as a result. The progressive levels of negative emotions are frustration, anxiety, impatience, exasperation, resentment, terror, and rage. The feeling of powerlessness typically arises somewhere around resentment. If we can’t get someone to meet our expectations it makes us feel powerless, and rage follows. Why? Because rage makes us feel powerful!

If you are not sure whether you’re having a feeling or an emotion, search for dialog. If there is *any* commentary, it’s emotion. Especially be aware that all drama is emotion.

We learn to distinguish, also, between judgment and evaluation. Judgment is in human consciousness, and determines whether something is right or wrong, good or bad. Evaluation has nothing to do with good and bad. It simply determines whether a behavior is effective or not. If it is effective we apply it; if not, we don’t. We are told to judge not, lest we be judged; but we are not denied the right to make evaluations. We must learn to evaluate only, never judge.

Note: If you love being right, or the illusion of power created by winning arguments, or the drama of fighting, or the excitement of make up sex -- you may want to continue attempting to manage your relationship on a nonspiritual basis.

However if you've experienced sufficient pain and suffering and suspect that the way you communicate, rather than who you are communicating with, is perhaps a problem, then Loving Sober™ has a fresh approach. It is based in following spiritual principle, as opposed to getting your partner to change so that you can feel better.

Please remember it is possible to have feelings with no emotion attached and be involved in successful, fulfilling relationships.

Spiritual Truths and Axioms

Spiritual Truths and Axioms

Here are 14 spiritual axioms and truths that underlie the Loving Sober™ teaching. An axiom is defined as “a self-evident truth that is accepted as a rule, principle or law, without proof,” but we do not ask you to accept these axioms. You are never asked to accept any of the spiritual truths that are presented in this book. You are simply asked to read them with an open mind and to try to understand what they are saying. We are confident that your own experience, as you proceed, will prove them to you. Come back to this section periodically and take another look at them. The first axiom is a fundamental principle of all metaphysics and mysticism. The others are some truths collected from Barbara Muhl tapes, which apply to all of the Non-negotiables (NNs) rather than a particular one, as well as some we’ve added, based on our experience with this work.

1. Our individual experience of life is determined by the content of our own individual consciousness. We are conditioned to believe that things outside of us strike our consciousness, producing our experience. This first self-evident spiritual principle, however counter-intuitive it seems at first,

states that it’s the other way around: *it’s the content of our consciousness, our beliefs, and our fears that produces our experience of things outside of us.* It’s not “seeing is believing,” it’s really “believing is seeing.”

For example, if we are looking forward to some point in the future when everything is going to be all right, we are believing that things are not all right now, and that is our experience.

This axiom says that it will continue to be our experience that things are not all right for as long as we continue to look forward to things being all right. The time we are looking forward to will never come. Some people spend their entire lives waiting throughout an endless series of events that they hope will make everything all right. Another way of stating this axiom is: Nothing happens to me that is not a reflection of my own beliefs and conditioning.

2. My behavior has damaged my relationships.

The behavior of others may have also damaged my relationships, but I am only responsible for my behavior, and I must clean it up.

3. The only sound basis for an adult relationship is to enhance mutual spiritual growth.

The purpose of the universe is not to provide us with a happy, carefree life, or an early retirement to a house with a white picket fence. The purpose of the universe is individual spiritual growth. The universe is like a spiritual university. It presents us with a series of lessons designed to allow us (or force us, if we're unwilling students) to grow spiritually, from our unwitting humanhood state to an enlightened transcendental consciousness. If we don't find the spiritual solutions to a lesson, it is presented again, in a different form. When we do solve it spiritually, the next lesson is presented. Relationships are a grand arena in which to grow spiritually because relationships bring up so many lessons.

4. Any relationship based on need won't work.

If we are needy, we will not be able to free other parties to fulfill themselves, nor will we be free to fulfill ourselves, or even to simply be ourselves, for fear that others might leave us.

5. What we hide is what we keep.

A popular saying is, "You are as sick as your secrets." We don't need to share everything with everyone, but if we can tell our deepest secrets to at least one person, and find that we are accepted as we are, we become free to move on. Also, saying something aloud, or, better yet, writing it down, makes it more real – we "realize" it. Then we are more able and more likely to work with or on it.

6. Lies only have power over us when we fail to recognize them.

No belief - ours or anyone else's - has any power *whatsoever* unless accepted. The instant the belief is recognized as a lie (when we see it's non-truth/non-reality down to "our toes") the experience of it having power vanishes.

7. Everyone (including you) is (and always has been) doing the best she or he can.

Every mistake we have ever made in our lives was because we were unwitting of something at that moment, something we needed to know in order to avoid the mistake.

If we had known better, we would have done better.

8. Guilt and remorse are not useful reactions to mistakes.

The effective response is to:

See the error.

Acknowledge it.

Determine to do better next time.

Guilt is not part of the solution and, *worry is not preparation.*

9. Every compulsive behavior is motivated by the terror of being powerless.

Barbara Muhl discovered that being powerless is the single most intolerable state in which human beings find themselves. Human beings will do almost anything to gain the illusion of some control over situations.

10. Friendship is only possible between adults.

Friendship requires equality. By applying the NNs, our relationship with our children - even adult children - can and certainly will become more genuine, but is not to be confused with friendship.

11. Nobody is cause for another's reality.

Our own concepts (the content of our consciousness) cause what we call our reality. You cannot cause me to be joyful or in pain. It is my reaction to what you do, my own beliefs, fears and conditioning that "causes" my pain or joy.

12. Talking about a problem reinforces it (unless we are in a therapeutic situation).

Hashing it over sustains it.

We need to find a method to solve the problem and get to work.

13. Love is simply unconditional acceptance.

14. Every act based in human consciousness is based in fear; every act based in God-consciousness is based in love.

Midweek Meeting Guidelines

Mid-week Meeting Guidelines

- Establish a weekly time and place to review your progress. Make sure that it is a quiet location where you can comfortably sit facing each other.
 - Agree that you will not answer telephones, texts, children, etc. during that time.
 - Agree that your discussion will be limited to the homework.
1. Meditate 5 minutes before you begin. Touch during the meditation if possible.
 2. Begin by telling each other two things that delighted you about your partner this past week.
 3. Review that week's materials. (Read them out loud to each other even if you've already read them silently.)

4. Review your progress. Describe what you noticed about your own behavior first. Then, *if invited*, describe how you interpreted your partner's behavior in terms of the past week's homework, using *How to Get a Response Instead of a Reaction*.
5. Remind each other how much you love each other and how fortunate you feel for having a partner interested and willing to grow spiritually through this process.
6. Meditate for five minutes.

Spiritual Intimacy

Spiritual Intimacy

We all have experienced the joys of physical intimacy, and in our relationship, we are given the opportunity to explore emotional intimacy. Loving Sober™ is designed to introduce or deepen couples familiarity within spiritual intimacy.

All of the apparent difficulties in the material world are three dimensional. The *sustainable* solution to relationship challenges is fourth dimensional, spiritual in nature. So, let me be clear: **The ideas presented in Loving Sober™ will NOT work without a shared meditation practice.** A spiritual transformation cannot enter a closed fist.

A common misconception is that meditation is impractical, time consuming, and too hard for those with busy minds. On the contrary: it highly practical, time enhancing and initially challenging for everyone alike, but well worth the investment.

In fact, meditation is the vital glue that keeps hearts expanding and awareness deepening. It takes the pressure off of us, our mates and the whole world.

There is something that happens when two people sit in spiritual contemplation and the silence that arises from that.

There is also a deepening of the union that goes beyond the conscious mind. There is a subtle increase in intimacy every time we sit and ponder Spirit with our significant other.

One of the wonderful things about making a commitment to meditate with your partner is that seldom are both partners seduced at the same time by the idea any thing or activity is more important than conscious contact with Spirit.

Every couple will find a unique mediation practice that works for them. Here's an example of how you might begin:

1. Select a space in your home where the two of you can sit comfortably in close proximity. Touch hands.
2. Read a short piece of any spiritual literature that speaks to you. Examples might include: Paul Ferrini's "Everyday Wisdom: a Spiritual Book of Days," "24 Hours a Day," "The Daily Reflections," or "The Runner's Bible".
3. Set a pleasant sounding timer for five minutes (<http://www.spotlightsix.com/>) just relax, close your eyes and breathe. Setting a timer is critical for beginners as it allows the mind to stop worrying about the clock. As your practice deepens, the desired meditation period will naturally expand. Don't try to force it.

Our Buddhist friends, who have been doing this for over four thousand years, call the beginners' mind the monkey mind because it tends to jump and shriek.

It will probably feel uncomfortable and like an eternity at first, but know that everyone goes through a similar experience. Small glimmers of a tremendous sense of peace will begin to appear in your awareness - a deep sigh, a realization that everything right now is absolutely OK, a sense of being taken care of, a realization that you are sitting in the presence of Love Itself. Be patient as the weeks and months pass; that sense of Peace in and as you will blossom.

4. When the timer goes off take a copy of a prayer or spiritual text - you might try the St. Francis Prayer or "1st Corinthians: 13", to begin with - and read it aloud to each other, alternating lines.

5. When you finish kiss and get up and go into your day.

Every couple that has tried this for thirty days has a psychic change in their experience of loving each other.

There are many wonderful tools that are available to those beginning a restarting a meditation practice, and there is no wrong way to meditate. The only way to do it wrong, is not to do it.

Courtesy vs. Rudeness

This is the simplest one. It is something all adults of good will want to perfect. Rudeness can abruptly terminate the meaningful communication upon which healthy relationships depend. Courtesy, on the other hand, greases the wheels of communication. We may be surprised though, at some of the items listed as forms of rudeness. We will actually spend the time up to the next session becoming aware of how often we indulge in some of these “lesser” forms of rudeness. Try to notice how even these forms of rudeness are aggressive (even when they seem passive).

This first week is a good time to begin noticing and admitting when we find ourselves engaging in discourteous behavior. By the mid-week meeting, you will be comfortable enough to start sharing your impressions of your partner’s successes and challenges using the “Response vs. Reaction Method.” found on pg.9



LOVING SOBER

Courtesy

Courtesy

Courtesy simply means good manners. Without courtesy, good communication is impossible.

- Being courteous is not a restraint in our communication. It is important to be able to communicate everything. *Courtesy is about finding the right way to say something.* Anything we need to say can be said courteously. We need to take the time necessary to find a courteous expression.

“I insist upon being courteous in all my adult relationships.”

Rudeness

Rudeness

Some forms of rudeness are:

- Interrupting (for example, not letting the other person finish a sentence or “tell their story”)
- Usurping, which means “take over” or “take possession of,” negates the other’s existence
- Inattention/ignoring/not responding
- Being sarcastic (which is really just a way of saying something negative without taking responsibility for saying it)
- Teasing
- Humiliating
- Ridiculing
- Nagging
- Being impatient
- Using inappropriate language
- Condescending

- Trampling
- Using certain body language (for example, rolling our eyes).
- Not hearing (having an automatic tin ear)

“I will no longer indulge in rude behavior.”

What Prevents Courtesy

What Prevents Courtesy?

- When I believe I am more important than you or others (what I say or do is more important).
- When I demand that you listen to me (a form of thought control, usurping, etc.).
- When I think I know more than you (and can state it better than you more quickly): I have an inflated sense of self-importance.
- When the only way I believe I can resist feeling powerless or helpless (i.e. frustrated) is to lash out rudely.
- When I'm ignorant of how to express good manners.
- When I need to take charge or be in control.
- When I need to build myself up by bringing you down, because I fear I'm not good enough.
- When I'm afraid to take responsibility for my actions.

"I commit to courtesy in all my adult relationships."

Example: Rude Phone Behavior

RUDE: My spouse is on the telephone engaged in a conversation. I walk in and demand his/her attention by asking a question, relaying information, mouthing words, pushing notes across the table... when actually, there is nothing so important that cannot wait until s/he is finished.

COURTEOUS: The moment I realize my partner is on the phone, I stop talking or demanding attention in any way and leave the immediate vicinity. I wait until the conversation has ended and s/he hangs up. I may choose to write the question or information down so as not to forget it, but I do not deliver the note because I realize that NO MATTER how important I believe my comment to be, it is not more important than the sanctity of my partner's conversation or the certainty of distracting his/her focused attention if I am discourteous.

OR

RUDE: I am in the car with my partner and get a call on my cell phone. I unconsciously indulge in a half hour of distraction - often either a loud conversation or completely withdrawn (texting) affair. In doing so, I invalidate my partner's existence.

COURTEOUS: I contract with my partner to abstain from cell phone activity in the car. If a special circumstance arises, we are free to clear exceptions with each other before picking up the phone or texting or we might answer the phone and say, "I am in the car with my partner, can I get back to you in a half hour?"

Week 1 Practice

Non-Negotiable 1 Practice

1. Sit five minutes per day. **This must be done with your partner.** If extenuating circumstances prevent you from doing so face-to-face with your partner, meditating together works by phone or Skype/Facetime.
2. Observe the physical sensations that precede your reactive/emotional behavior (see “Emotions vs Feelings.”)
Hint: you may feel a tightened stomach or neck, stop breathing, feel tightened shoulders, etc.
3. List three courteous and three rude behaviors that YOU participate in and
4. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

Sensitivity vs. Aggression

Sensitivity is a step up from courtesy. It requires being present with your partner - being aware of and responsive to him or her - here and now. It does not mean touchiness.

Aggression is a step up from rudeness. Powerlessness ties these two together. The feeling of powerlessness leads to resentment, anger, and rage (in that order). Aggression can accompany any of these stages. Road rage is a perfect example of powerlessness leading to rage accompanied by aggression.

Sensitivity enables us to avoid behavior that results in others feeling powerless. Many of us have been in a relationship with someone so insensitive that we seldom, if ever, felt heard or understood correctly. We felt powerless.



LOVING SOBER

Sensitivity

Sensitivity

Sensitivity is:

Seeing and hearing our partner.

- Trying to understand her or him correctly (“wearing his or her shoes”).
- Being alert enough to recognize where the other is coming from.
- Being present enough to avoid doing anything that would result in another feeling powerless.
- Empowering others. “I see you, I hear you,” is empowering.

Sensitivity also means honoring our partner’s background and history. When being intimate there may be ways of expressing affection that are not appropriate or do not feel safe to your partner because of past experiences, particularly painful ones. These are not boundaries to be tested, rather to be respected.

Sensitivity allows us to feel safe at all times and in all situations. For many of us, this may be the first time in our lives.

Note : One definition of life is that it is an organism that can respond to its environment. An increase in sensitivity, therefore, means an increase in “response-ability.” Hence, we become more alive as we become more sensitive.

“I commit to sensitivity in all my adult relationships.”

Aggression

Aggression

Aggressive behaviors include:

- Physical abuse
- Yelling (or simply raising our voice)
- Ignoring (not seeing, not hearing)
- Withdrawing (passive aggression)
- Withholding (passive aggression)
- Impatience
- Overpowering
- Belittling

The most destructive form of aggression is making someone feel powerless. If we can learn to recognize when we are making another feel powerless, we will be able to stop.

When we recognize our feeling of powerlessness by our desire to become aggressive, what do we do? We must stop it at the moment of awareness by becoming spiritually centered again.

How to become spiritually centered when in emotion:

We disengage from our partner - *and* we let our partner disengage from us. Nothing, absolutely nothing constructive can occur by trying to solve the situation when both or one

partner is emotional. At the very least, we go into another room as calmly as we can, sit down, walk or run, journal or find another way to allow the adrenaline to subside and to identify that our emotional distress is being **caused** by racing thoughts that are nothing but a replayed story.

Once we can see the story in play, we are separate from it and are no longer controlled by it. We wait until we've relaxed. This may take moments or hours. Nothing good will ever come from trying to resolve an issue before this sort of spiritual centeredness is achieved. Only then can we begin to recognize that the sense of powerlessness, like the story, is a lie and remember the Truth, which is that all is unfolding perfectly.

If we are not in emotion, it often takes less time to become spiritually-centered; we might sit down and read a passage from a spiritual book, pause and reflect on the gratitude we feel for our partner, etc., or meditate until we feel the conscious presence of a Power greater than our sense of self. (Remember, if mental dialogue is occurring, we are in emotion, period.)

We always have options. We can try to find a way to address our sense of powerlessness, either through communication or temporary withdrawal. If we can learn to recognize when another's actions are triggering our sense of powerlessness, we will be able to do something constructive about it.

“I will not be aggressive in my relationships.”

What Prevents Sensitivity ?

What prevents sensitivity?

- When I feel powerless. All of the forms of aggression are attempts to exert power.
- When I am tired of being nagged, pushed, poked, and wrested from my freedom.
- When I feel that I must tune out to get away from my partner's nagging and demands.
- When I believe my partner responds to me in a mean, brutal, or harsh manner whose outcome is my feeling powerless or hurt.
- When I feel vulnerable. Especially amongst men, it's easier and more "acceptable" to be aggressive than to be fearful or vulnerable.
- When I feel rejected or not good enough and need to take charge.
- When I have attempted to make my partner feel utterly powerless and only by yelling/screaming do I feel I seen or paid attention to.

There is a price for being sensitive. It takes time, energy, and focus. As we become more sensitive we realize that the payoff for sensitivity is far greater than the price.

Example: Aggression in the Car

AGGRESSIVE: I am running late to a speaking engagement in Santa Barbara - 90 minutes away from our home - a drive that my wife and I usually enjoy, a place we have shared many wonderful moments. I am driving 90 mph (I am certain, safely). My wife becomes visibly nervous -stiff body, leaning forward, scrunched brow; she asks me (in an high pitched voice) to slow down because I am putting us in harms' way. (She is terrified. Her story, "I can't make it stop" has kicked in). She perceives cars are swerving very close and narrowly missing us. She begs, implores, demands and finally slugs me to get me to slow down.

I am convinced she is incorrect and continue driving fast to meet my commitment on time because I'm convinced that I, not she is perceiving the situation correctly. (My "I will always be controlled" story kicks in). I make no change in my behavior other than telling her she's wrong.

My wife later conveyed that she felt utterly powerless and terrified -- in a 2,500 pound death machine. She felt that my behavior indicated that my speaking engagement was more important than her life. Remember, these kinds of events trigger past memories and experiences associated with terror. Given that, seeming "over-reaction" is the only possible result.

In addition, perception is, by definition, subjective. Our job as lovers is to know that our perception is just that, and to be sensitive to the perceptions of those we love regardless of our whether we believe ours is correct.

SENSITIVE: If I had been sensitive to her instead of thinking that she was overreacting and trying to control me. I could have pulled over and slowed down, or I could have stopped waited until we were both out of emotion. I could have been a half hour late and very few would have known or been even mildly inconvenienced.

Week 2 Practice

Non-Negotiable 2 Practice

1. Notice if you are *responding* (answering from your center) or *reacting* (re-acting the past).
2. Notice if you are behaving aggressively. Try and stop the moment you are aware, disengage until you are calm and can ask yourself, “Why am I feeling powerless?”
3. Identify three examples of where I am aggressive in the relationship and identify three times my partner is sensitive in the relationship
4. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

***Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day***

Freedom vs. Oppression

In order for there to be joy in a relationship, both parties have to be free. We cannot feel joy when we are being oppressed. A bird in the hand isn't really a bird.

The work for the next week is to notice whenever we indulge in any oppressive behavior, observe how it feels and how it's affecting our relationships, and consciously free the other by stopping the oppression. If we find we can't, we need to discover the need, fear or conditioning that is preventing us.



LOVING SOBER

Freedom

Freedom

Allowing freedom, the positive behavior in this NN, is simply stopping all forms of oppression. Freedom is the individual freedom to be ourselves. It is an ongoing state of consciousness. If my consciousness is free, I am free. Joy results from being involved in our own spiritual development – being involved consciously in our expanding consciousness. We need to be free to do this.

Freedoms include freedom to:

- Develop ourselves.
- Be who we are, not who the other wants us to be.
- Be wrong; make mistakes.
- Determine our own pace; listen to our own drummer.
- Find our own way of doing things.
- Pursue our own spiritual path.
- Come and go as we please.
- Express ourselves openly.

“I commit to promoting freedom in all my adult relations.”

Oppression

Oppression

Oppression is doing anything that impedes someone's freedom, including:

- Clinging
- Crowding
- Controlling
- Being impatient
- Dominating
- Impeding
- Imposing upon
- Causing guilt
- Being needy
- Being pushy
- Being negative
- Criticizing (sometimes)
 - If it's uninvited, or the result of judgment, it's probably oppressive
 - If it's the invited result of evaluation, it may not be oppression

What do we do when we sense we're being oppressed? We must stop it the moment we become aware that we are feeling oppressed. It may not be true that the other intends to impose, but it is all right to express that we feel imposed upon. "I suspect that you're probably not aware of it, but when you do that, I feel imposed upon."

And when that is said to you, STOP! Back off! Give the other time and space in which to consider whether or not they are really being oppressed. Later you can ask "How would you like me to say that, or do that?"

"I will no longer indulge in oppressive behavior>"

What Prevents Freedom?

What prevents freedom?

- When I need to be in control.
- When I can't handle being alone.
- When I'm afraid of being ignored or treated indifferently.
- When I'm afraid you'll abandon me When I believe I *need* rather than acknowledge I *have* (spiritual centeredness – all my needs are being met) and don't allow my partner freedom to grow intellectually, artistically, spiritually (e.g., by leaning on them).
- When I need something from you that I am not providing for myself.
- When I need to be in control.
- When I can't handle being alone.
- When I'm afraid of being ignored or treated indifferently.
- When I'm afraid you'll abandon me.
- When I feel threatened or insecure.
- When I oppress myself with compulsive thought patterns

Example: Oppressive behavior when Feeling Frisky

OPPRESSIVE: I was stunned when presented with the list of oppressive behaviors by how many of them that I (the spiritually sensitive man I claim to be) used when I wanted to have sex with my wife. I would follow her around the house with a hungry look on my face, corner her or press against her (especially in bed), and when she ignored those behaviors, I would become irritated or sulk. Mind you, I was not straightforward with her for fear of being rejected (again). Is it any wonder that she withdrew rather than welcoming my overtures?

She conveyed later that she was most angry that I wasn't straightforward, and that in addition, she felt I expected her to be responsible for my agitation and my release. She felt objectified.

FREEDOM: As a partner, I need never feel bad about expressing my sexual desires and communicating them honestly and clearly to my partner. I need never feel guilty for feeling amorous. I also need to know that my voicing needs is my right and responsibility. What she does with that information is hers. I need to respect whether the timing works for her.

In the process of going through this chapter for the first time, I was shocked to discover that to my wife, having sex at the end of the day felt like more work. She was exhausted and considered this one more demand on her time and energy. To

her, mornings or afternoons after a good night sleep were preferable. I was also shocked and delighted to find out that sex was more exciting to her in other parts of the house.

So, we made adjustments, I stopped the aggressive behaviors, and we decided to have fun. She also made a list of her dishonest sex-related behaviors (pretending she was asleep, pretending that sex wasn't that important to her, etc.) and so did I (being straightforward instead of pretending it wasn't important). We laughed and agreed to quit pretending.

Note: Communication about sex seems to be universally tough. Human conditioning and painful past experiences - especially for folks in recovery - create a dance that the lovers cannot seem to stop, though they both may feel sexually unfulfilled and want more sexual intimacy with their partner. The dance brings up a sense of powerlessness that is often met with play for control.

“I must be free and allow freedom in all my adult relationships.”

Week 3 Practice

Non-Negotiable 3 Practice

The work for the this week is to notice whenever we indulge in any oppressive behavior, observe how it feels and how it's affecting the relationship, and consciously free the other by stopping the oppression.

1. List 3 things that you don't feel you are free to do in the relationship and share them with your partner.
2. List 3 oppressive behaviors you engage in (see oppression examples).
3. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day

Truthfulness vs. Dishonesty

Nothing undermines a relationship quicker than lack of trust. Obviously we must be truthful if we want to be trusted. How difficult this one is depends on whether we have developed the habit of being truthful, and on how afraid we are that telling the truth will result in losing someone or something, or in being laughed at or ridiculed.

Many of us were raised in homes where we were told, "Honesty is the best policy." Yet we were shown that dishonesty was a relationship survival technique. It was demonstrated that honesty was flexible. Things like.....

"What she doesn't know, won't hurt her."

"If she finds out she'll only get angry and neither of us want her to be angry."

"This can just be our little secret."

"You know what will happen if your father finds out."

There is no justification for dishonesty. Though we always have the right not to speak ("I'm not comfortable discussing that right now."); however, it's never OK to lie.



LOVING SOBER

Truthfulness

Truthfulness

- No relationship can survive without truthfulness.
 - As adults we must always say what we mean.
 - We cannot be honest with anyone until we have been honest with ourselves. Some of us may have great difficulty in being honest with ourselves.
 - We must learn the art of introspection.
 - We are always privileged not to speak.
 - Just because someone asks us a question, it doesn't mean we have to answer it.
 - We can simply say, "I am not ready to answer that," or "I don't choose to answer that."
 - It is helpful to determine a time when you will discuss something, e.g. "Though I'm not prepared to answer that now, I'll be happy to discuss it at our mid-week meeting on Wednesday."
 - If we do speak, we must speak the truth as clearly as we know it.
 - We do not have to say everything we know but what we do say must be the truth. Careful...lying by omission is still lying (example: "I bought a dress on sale today. I omit that I bought a watch and pair of earrings too.)
- Truthfulness has nothing to do with giving our opinion.
 - Truthfulness is not an excuse to be brutally honest, although truth can hurt.
 - Truthfulness is telling you about how I feel or what I've done, not about sharing what I think about you.
 - Truthfulness is not about unsolicited frankness. Truthfulness identifies how I feel, think and act (or have acted), whereas frankness is a judgement which refers to what I think about someone else. It is seldom kind, generous or helpful.
- **"I must be truthful in all my relationships."**

Dishonesty

Dishonesty

Dishonesty will destroy a relationship, even if the other does not know you are being dishonest. They really do know subconsciously.

Dishonesty includes:

- Lying, *including white lies*. Any kind of lie undermines trust.
Once I know there are circumstances under which you will lie, I will always wonder if the current situation is one of them.
- Allowing someone to believe an untruth.
- Exaggerating.
- Stating our opinion as if it were truth.
- Saying “just kidding” to avoid taking responsibility for something said.
- Telling partial truths to give a false impression.

“No relationship can survive my dishonesty.”

What Prevents Truthfulness?

What prevents truthfulness?

- If I'm not honest with myself it is impossible to be honest with my partner (e.g., when I am not honest with myself about what I am feeling).
- When I feel that I don't deserve what I'm not asking for, am ashamed of asking, or am afraid of being rejected.
- When I would rather *win* the argument than be honest with my partner or myself.
- When I feel pressured to say things I don't want to say.
- When I believe my partner is withholding the truth from me.
- When I've done something I would not want my partner to know.
- When I have done something I am ashamed of.
- When I am afraid that if you knew what I have done it will damage our relationship.
- When I'm afraid that if I'm truthful I will:
 - lose and thereby be rendered powerless.
 - be judged, for example that I'm not good enough.
 - be laughed at.
 - be abandoned.

Example: Dishonesty with Money

DISHONEST: Though I know that I will be short on my half of the bills (my income is variable this month), I say nothing, thereby giving the false impression that the full amount will be deposited on time. I tell myself that the money will arrive any moment because, I believe that this time it will. I feel frightened of my partner's anger and I feel guilty. (While growing up, money interactions were always emotionally charged and sometimes ended violently.)

When my wife notices that a check bounced three weeks later, she asks me what happened. She is agitated when approaching me (this has happened many times before - each time, I promised never to do it again. Her story about always being tricked is activated. She feels powerless and reacts with rage). After much skittishness, I finally tell her. She barrages me with questions. I clam up and become unable to answer.

HONEST: My wife always handled our finances. Everything was in her name; all credit and debit cards for our home were held by her. When I made purchases, I had to ask to borrow them. Our money relationship reflected a power dynamic that we could not seem to escape.

A spiritually mature financial relationship remains challenging for us as it is with many couples. We had to learn to discuss it when no specific money issue was at hand. We became aware that our physical location was contributing to the power play (My wife would bring up finances when she had me cornered in a room or car. We began limiting all money talk to open spaces, agreed not to discuss money after 9 pm or when we were tired (regardless of the time), or when either of us needed additional time to sort out our thoughts and to get facts and figures together, or, interestingly enough, when either of us had to go to the bathroom.)

We began a regular monthly banking review that allows us to discuss our finances free from emotion. We opened a joint trust account for the household finances. I began to deposit what I promised and if an emergency arose, tell her immediately upon learning of it. Our financial relationship stopped being governed by our fears.

Week 4 Practice

Non-Negotiable 4 Practice

Lies only have power over us when we fail to recognize them.

1. Practice becoming aware of your lying. If you feel safe enough, claim your lie.
2. List three places you believe it is justifiable not to tell the truth.
3. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day.

Straightforwardness vs Manipulation

It should be clear that the simplest way to let someone know what we want is to ask for it. Yet we often try to manipulate others into giving us what we want, or doing what we want, without having asked first. Why don't we just ask?

Because we're afraid!

Manipulation is any attempt to get what we want without having to feel exposed by asking for it. How difficult it will be to stop manipulating depends on how afraid we are of not getting the reaction we want.



LOVING SOBER

Straightforwardness

Straightforwardness

Straightforwardness means being willing and able to ask for what we want. It also means being willing and able to express our feelings.

- In order to ask for what we want, we have to know what we want.
 - If we don't know what we want in a relationship, we're lost.
 - Being straightforward means we must speak out and not beat around the bush.
- Straightforwardness is not about *getting* what we want. It is about *asking* for what we want, with no guarantee that we'll get it.
- Don't confuse straightforwardness with truthfulness.
 - If we talk, we must be truthful.
 - If we want something, we must be straightforward.
- Straightforwardness doesn't mean hammering someone down. We do not demand; rather, we ask for what we want.

“I must be straightforward in all my adult relationships.”

Manipulation

Manipulation

Manipulation is one of the most destructive aspects of relationships. People know deep down inside when someone is trying to manipulate them, and they resent it. If we want healthy relationships, we can't manipulate any more than we can lie. Often we're conditioned to manipulate rather than to be straightforward. We learn it growing up around parents, teachers, clergy, etc. who are not straightforward.

Manipulation is any method we use to get our own way *other than* asking for it in a straightforward manner, such as when I:

- Hint, hoping they'll guess what I want.
- Lie so, they'll make a different decision than they would have otherwise.
- Get sick, so we won't have to say no, or so people will leave us alone.
- Deflect responsibility: create an emotional event that makes it seem as if not getting what I want is being withheld or derailed by my partner, rather than by my not asking for it.
- Am unable to ask for anything without drama or anger. I can demand something if I'm mad, but am unable to ask for it in a calm, straightforward manner.

If I don't get what I want by being straightforward and asking for it, I can *negotiate*. It is always possible to use *persuasion*. Persuasion is not manipulative. Negotiation and persuasion are both necessary in a relationship. Present the case logically and reasonably, backing it up with facts and evidence, don't let a drop of manipulation enter.

Let each case stand on its own merit. This is an absolutely legitimate way to communicate in a relationship.

Be careful not to settle for a compromise when compromising means agreeing to something that is not satisfying to either party. Get spiritually-centered (see page 23), discuss the matter and arrive at an agreement about what is the right choice is for both parties and the relationship.

If we haven't asked for what we want in a straightforward manner, then all attempts at persuasion are manipulation.

"I will not manipulate my partner."

What Prevents Straightforwardness?

What prevents straightforwardness?

- When I'm afraid that:
 - I won't get what I want.
 - I will be judged and rejected.
 - I will be ridiculed or abandoned.
 - I don't believe I'm worthy.
 - You'll think I don't fit in, or I'm not acceptable.
 - You'll laugh at me.
 - You'll leave me.
 - By asking for what I want I will become vulnerable.
 - I'm not deserving of what I want.
- When I think I have to manipulate to get what I want.
- When I am unable to express my feelings.
- When game playing has become habitual; It's the only way I know.
- When I truly believe I'm being straightforward, but am not. (Hint: If your partner does not understand the desire you are expressing, you are not being straightforward.)
- When I must keep the peace by any means or die (i.e. manipulation).
- When I'm not willing to *not* get what I want.
- When I have no experience or knowledge of how to negotiate or use the art of persuasion to make a case for what I want.
- When I have no experience in being straightforward with regards to sex.

Example: Manipulation when I can't say NO!

My wife, Adell, wrote this:

MANIPULATIVE: I often did not want to participate in activities that I believed I "should" want to participate in - mostly those that included being in crowds or participating in convention activities that Jay was participating in. I felt drained by them, uncomfortable in such environments (bright lights, air conditioning, buzzing activity) and exhausted by what I experienced as erratic energy. Though there were parts of the events that I enjoyed, which was confusing to me (if it was at all fun, I shouldn't be feeling this way), the overall effect *inevitably* had a negative impact on me, and ultimately, Jay. Here's how it worked. The event was announced. My story would kick in: "You must go - everyone else thinks it's wonderful and besides, you're a bad wife if you don't. He's a main speaker! You are selfish. Something is wrong with you if you don't like what everyone else seems to"

I would tell Jay that I wanted to go (and meant it), and for years, convince myself I could go without consequence. The outcome: a week in bed after the event or as the years progressed and I kept repeating this behavior, escalation: I'd

become quite ill the night before and have to cancel. It was not a fake illness - the body would say what the mouth would not. I ended up hospitalized several times.

Leading up to the event, Jay would advise me that it was OK not to go and that it didn't seem like a good idea considering the past results; not only was it awful for me to cancel at the last minute, but if I did manage to go, I'd either complain during it or be a wreck after.

Upon hearing his suggestion, my "He's trying to control me" story would kick in and I would yell at him to let me make up my own mind.

It seems crazy not to see the pattern from this vantage point, but I truly didn't realize that my attempt to be what I thought a good wife was caused both of us tremendous pain. I was too frightened to tell either myself or him the truth about hating such events because of my own judgement about myself and fear of what he and others would think

STRAIGHTFORWARD: After 12 years of this (no kidding), I finally admitted that the cost of attending such activities was not worth the price, and that I loved him, but didn't like the events. When a convention that we'd both attended every year for almost two decades came up, I committed not to go at all well in advance. I stayed home and planted flowers and was in heaven. He lived through the "Where's Adell?" questions and was able to relax and thoroughly enjoy himself doing everything he wanted to, but might not have done had he felt responsible to care for me there. We were both so relieved and I stopped attending such events. Would you believe it, I stopped getting sick too!

Week 5 Practice

Non-Negotiable 5 Practice

1. List three examples of when my partner is straightforward.
2. List three examples of things I want from my partner or in my relationship.
3. Practice negotiating one thing daily.
4. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day.

Independence vs. Expectations

Independence means not being dependent, not being needy.

This is a good time to review axiom 3:

Any relationship based on need won't work.

Expectations are a primary source of discord, especially if we expect someone to do something we haven't directly asked for in a straightforward manner. The worst type of expectations are those where we think our happiness depends on them being met.

If we are dependent on anyone or anything, we are not free. We do make plans based on others doing what they say they will do, but to the extent that our livelihood or happiness depends on it, we might better spending our energy on backup plans rather than expectations.



LOVING SOBER

Independence

Independence

To achieve healthy relationships, we must maintain our individuality and Independence. This may require reducing or eliminating our expectations of others.

When we have reached independence in a relationship, we have self-respect and freedom.

“I commit to promoting independence in all of my relationships.”

Expectations

Expectations

An expectation is anything we expect from another person.

Expectations include expecting anything that has not been explicitly contracted for, particularly those things that we think, or assume, the other person *should* do, and those based on our “rights.”

Expectations lead to resentments; resentments lead to anger; anger leads to rage.

The potential for resentment depends on our investment in having our expectation fulfilled.

If we constantly have expectations, then we may be constantly disappointed and become aggressive and resentful toward the other person because of them.

- Whenever we are let down or disappointed, we had an expectation.
- Expectations are resentments “under construction.”
- Expectations take us out of the now. We literally are imposing our idea of how the future should be on our unsuspecting partner.
- Conflict arises out of clashing expectations.
- Expectations set up a resistance in the other person, even if they are not aware of it. We radiate, and others pick up subliminally, whatever is going on within us

We are naturally passionate about freedom, so we feel uncomfortable when someone has expectations of us that limit our freedom.

There are **no** constructive expectations.

Expecting that something will happen does not improve the likelihood of its happening. But it does bring the potential for disappointment. Expectations create the possibility of them not being met.

We know that people of good will attempt to do what they’ve promised, but there’s nothing to be gained by expecting them to do so. They may not be able to do as promised for a perfectly good reason.

Expectations are often based on knowing how things are “supposed to be,” which is human conditioning, not truth.

Having expectations is a spiritual error because it means we are looking outside ourselves for fulfillment. e.g., expecting justice from a court is a mistake. Lawyers, judges, witnesses and jurors are human, capable of error. Realizing harmony and justice as the nature of God, and having that materialize in our experience, is the better way.

Getting caught up in expectations is a bottomless pit. Each one leads to 50 more.

“I commit to dropping all of my expectations”

What Prevents Independence?

What Prevents Independence?

When I have expectations because I:

- Believe I know how things ought to be.
- Believe I know what people should do.
- Have a fantasy of how people and/or things should be.
- Am unable to live in the *now* (expectations are grounded in the future).
- Am not spiritually centered (sense of self running the show).
- Lack the ability to get someones' agreement on something.
- Need to lean on you, rather than take care of myself.
- Think you should be able to read my mind and know what I want.

Example: Expecting my partner to know when I'm HALT

EXPECTATIONS: I often have an expectation that my partner can and should read my mind, know when I am hungry, angry, lonely and or tired (HALT) and know that this is not the time for us to have an important conversation.

Often, I am not aware that I am hungry or overtired until I find myself getting irritated and on the fast track to emotion (example: telling myself she's trying to control me).

INDEPENDENCE: When I notice an edge to my voice or that I'm becoming agitated during a conversation, I ask myself this: do I need to go to the bathroom, am I hungry or overtired? More often than not, that's the source of my touchiness and our impending argument. At that point, I tell her what's up and we both agree that this is not the best time to have the conversation.

We HALT the conversation until those needs are addressed and we agree on a time to reconvene and discuss the matter (often, it's the next day). The awareness that there are no good outcomes to serious conversations after 9 pm has been very helpful.

If my wife needs to take action at that time, she is free to do so. I am free to take care of my needs so that I can be available for an adult conversation when the agreed upon time comes.

Week 6 Practice

Non-Negotiable 6 Practice

1. Share the three most outrageous expectations that you have of yourself. (example: I should be able to take care of all my wife's emotional, financial and physical needs.)
2. Write down three of the most outrageous expectations you have of your relationship.
3. Write down three of the most outrageous expectations you have of your spouse and the stories you tell yourself if they aren't met.
4. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day.

Acceptance vs. Concepts

There are two aspects of acceptance here. The first is about being here now, with a quiet mind, seeing what is before us, as distinct from assuming things are as we think they are; the second is about accepting that things are as they appear to be, as distinct from how we think they should be.

Concepts include all the ideas we have about how people or things are or should be. Since our experience is the projection of our own beliefs, our concepts determine and limit the possibilities in our experience. We will have experiences that conform to our concepts rather than seeing all that is possible.

This is about permitting ourselves to see *what is*, and allowing others to be who they really are, rather than seeing and reacting to what our concepts of them are.



LOVING SOBER

Acceptance

Acceptance

- Acceptance means accepting others for who they are right now.
- It doesn't mean we have to like them.
- Liking them will happen when they become likable.
- Acceptance means not imposing our concepts *about* our partner *on* them.
- Acceptance has nothing to do with making what is, OK; it simply means seeing what is.

“ I will practice acceptance in all of my relationships.”

Concepts

Concepts

- Concepts about others are conclusions we have arrived at based on past behavior, past relationships, or past conditioning. It's important not to cling to negative concepts about another. We learn to live in the now without holding people to past mistakes.
- Concepts might as well be true, since they form our experience and are barriers to truth.
- If we hold on to concepts about ourselves, we are holding ourselves in bondage (for example, being inadequate, insufficient, stupid, lacking in something etc.)
- If we hold onto concepts of others, we are denying them the opportunity to be who they really are around us, and ourselves the opportunity to experience who they really are.
- Expectations are about the future. Concepts are conclusions based in the past.
- Sentences with “supposed to” “ought to” or “should” are all about concepts. No such statement is spiritually true. What is, is what should be.
- If we have a concept about another, we are having a relationship with our concept, not with the other.
-

“” **I will not impose my concepts of my partner, on my partner**

What Prevents Acceptance?

What Prevents Acceptance?

- I have been seduced out of a sense of spirit and into materialism (and thus am susceptible to judgement, criticism, condemnation and erroneous concepts.) It is almost impossible to remain spiritually centered and directed, rather than materially focused without a regular meditation practice.
- When I'm too self-centered to look at you.
- When I'd rather think I know who you are than spend the time necessary to see who you truly are.

Example: 3 RELATIONSHIP concepts that keep me living in the past:

CONCEPTS:

1. Since my wife and I are "spiritual," we should never disagree.
2. I'm not able to count on my wife to show up for me. I must know and take care of my wife's wants and desires (even if she hasn't communicated them or tells me I am wrong about my conclusions) before I look to my own.

ACCEPTANCE:

1. Adults of good will can have equally valid yet differing points of view. Discord enters only when one insists theirs is the correct view.
2. My wife does show up for me when and if she can, but she can only do so if I'm straightforward about what I want. If she can't, it has nothing to do with me.
3. Attempts to mind read is projection and should not be confused with spiritual insight. In addition, in always looking to what I'm convinced she wants first, I usurp her ability to be who she really is and give to and receive from me freely.

Example: 3 SELF concepts that keep me living in the past:

1. I must always provide financial, emotional and physical support to my family (wife, daughter, grandmother, mother and sisters.)
2. I should be able to spiritually transcend any problem. Spiritual transcendence will always appear as the "corrected" material solution.
3. I need to figure things out myself. I am *never* allowed to ask for help.

ACCEPTANCE:

1. God is Source. I am here to love and support my family, not manage and control their lives.

2. Being spiritual is being present in this moment, not a material prize to be won.
3. Not asking for help is self-centeredness, lack of humility in the extreme.

Example: 3 PARTNER concepts that keep me living in the past:

CONCEPTS:

1. My wife is fragile and needs to be protected.
2. I cannot trust my wife to know what's good for her and behave accordingly.
3. She will never be honest about the level of pain she is in, especially in love making.

ACCEPTANCE:

1. My wife is a perfect expression of God and God doesn't need my meddling. By believing and treating her as fragile, I keep her imprisoned in that role.
2. My wife's relationship with her Source/Higher Power is impeccable. That is where my trust need be placed.
3. What my wife thinks about any experience is none of my business until she chooses to share that information with me. I need only stay open and supportive.

Week 7 Practice

Non-Negotiable 7 Practice

1. Become aware of each time you say,

"Supposed to"

"Ought to"

"Should"

We call these SOS. Our mantra is Nonsense!

We are never to do anything in response to SOS.

2. Make the following lists:

- 3 concepts you have of yourself, your partner and your relationship (see Chapter 7 Examples).
- 3 past mistakes I perceive I've made that keep me tied to the past.
- 3 mistakes I perceive my partner has made that keep me living in the past.

3. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day.

Time and Space Alone vs Crowding

We need time and space alone as much as we need air to breathe. This is the time when we pursue our own spiritual growth and fulfillment, which will enhance the relationship, but which is distinct from the growth and fulfillment of the relationship. We need time and space alone to go within and discover our own spiritual truth. When we are being crowded, we are unable to do our spiritual work.



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Time and Space Alone

Time and Space Alone

This is an opportunity to enjoy aloneness (all oneness). There is a difference between loneliness and aloneness *All oneness* is never lonely. In order to enjoy being alone, all one, we must discover that we are *all one* with our Source, our spiritual center. We'll come to love that. The more we are *all one* the more we can increase our consciousness contact with our spiritual center. Learning to be *all one* means that we will never again be lonely.

Time and space alone may mean a few seconds or a few years. Often a few minutes alone to go within is sufficient to meet the needs of the moment, for example, when we are in emotion; sometimes we need longer, like a weekend retreat, perhaps to pursue a spiritual answer; sometimes even more, like a sabbatical, to completely rejuvenate ourselves and our thinking.

How do we get time and space *all one*? We schedule it! If we leave it to happenstance, it won't happen. If we're having trouble fitting everything into our schedule we might want to develop the discipline of scheduling our time. When we address a new week we first schedule everything that is essential for our own well being.

This includes sufficient rest, nutrition, exercise and play, as well as time alone for personal spiritual work. If we don't schedule them all in first, the never-ending requests (demands) on our time from others will prevent us from taking care of ourselves, and if we don't take care of ourselves we have nothing to give others.

“ I commit to creating time and space in all of my relationships”

Crowding

Crowding

Crowding means getting too close, invading another's personal space, not giving enough room. Crowding includes:

- Inordinate demands on another's time and attention. (It's up to each of us to decide how much of ourselves we want to give and for how long.)
- Verbal pressure (including demanding answers)
- Nagging
- Clinging
- Pushing
- One motivation for crowding is a desire to get close. It accomplishes exactly the opposite, it creates separation. The other feels crowded and tries to get away.

If we feel we are being imposed upon, we are being crowded. We need to stop this imposition as soon as it occurs; if we don't, we'll feel frustration, resentment, anger and rage.

One possibility is to straightforwardly ask for some time and space.

"I will not crowd my partner."

What Prevents Time and Space Alone

What Prevents Time and Space Alone?

When I need:

- To be close. I'm afraid of being alone. (Crowding someone accomplishes exactly the opposite. The other feels smothered and tries to get away).
- To control the other or the situation.
- To be needed.
- To be taken care of.
- To be paid attention to.

Or, when I fear I'm about to be rejected or abandoned (possibly because of my own crowding).

Example: Crowding my partner when s/he gets home from work

CROWDING: I am an extrovert. In fact, my wife, says I don't believe an event has happened until I tell someone. Hence, when she arrived home from work, it was important for me to share with her the events and insights of my day. This

appeared as me following her from room to room as she put down her work things, all the while talking at her enthusiastically.

She, appears to be an introvert, and was a college business professor whose job was to interact with students from 7 am until 10 pm three times a week. When she got home, she felt exhausted, tired of talking and listening and drained. Home was the safe destination where she could finally let down, be quiet and be surrounded by quiet.

As I followed her around, she literally ran from room to room trying to escape until she would yell at me in frustration to leave her alone. I felt unwanted and unseen. She felt crowded and unseen.

TIME AND SPACE: One night in frustration she said, "I can't hear one more word! I've used up my quota for today."

Presented that way it made perfect sense. After that we had an understanding that when she came home she got the time she needed to unwind. Even if she came straight home and went to bed I didn't take it personally. Just knowing she had space to be quiet when she came home allowed her to be available sooner.

When Adell arrived home, I left her completely alone for an agreed upon hour. That meant I did not follow her or try to speak with her. She often got something to eat and went into the bedroom to lay down until she felt refreshed. When she was ready, she came out and we talked. At times, she'd go straight to sleep and we'd catch up the next day.

Week 8 Practice

Non-Negotiable 8 Practice

1. Get a master calendar for the kitchen.
 - a. List the activities for the week's commitments, activities and social engagements etc.
 - b. Schedule retreats for the coming year - one for each of you and one for you together.
 - c. If you have children, allow them to add their activities too!
2. Write out how "I unwind" so that you know what you need and it them with your partner. You may be surprised at how very different your unwinding methods are.
3. Create a personal space for time to be "all one" and schedule that time. If you live in a small space, agree to have silent time when requested.
4. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day.

Joy in Accomplishments vs Competetion

Taking (and expressing) joy in the accomplishments of others lifts us and brings us closer together.

Competition, on the other hand, separates us and pits us against each other. It creates aggression and resentment. Competition fosters ego expansion.

The spiritual path is about letting go of the ego experience.



LOVING SOBER

Taking Joy in Accomplishments

Taking joy in accomplishments

In Spirit, there is harmony, an order that never competes. We are all indispensable parts of the greater whole.

- If you really care about my development, then you will find pleasure in my accomplishments.
- I can take joy in another's accomplishments because it takes nothing from me.

"I will seek to enjoy all of my partners accomplishments."

Competition

Competition

Competition is a miserable state of mind that takes no pleasure from another's accomplishments.

- If we're competing, we're not *playing*. It's not a joyous game, and we're not having fun.
- We can play and enjoy "the game" without concern for winning or losing.
- Happiness is found in the process of doing, not competing.
- Wanting to win is competition.
- Winning is goal oriented. It takes us out of enjoying "the game" now.
- If another's success makes us feel *less than*, we have to correct that within ourselves. It is our own spiritual error.
- The saying, "It's not whether we win or lose, but how we play the game that counts" refers to our own sense of integrity. Integrity is joy producing.
- Achieving is different from competing.

- Competition allows us to compare ourselves with others and be envious or jealous (the two most miserable emotions).
- Being competitive with ourselves is just as misery producing. Beware of setting goals.

"I will not be competitive in my adult relationships."

What Prevents Taking Joy?

What prevents taking joy in another's accomplishments?

When I:

- Need to prove that I'm good enough, or accepted, or valued.
- Am afraid that if you accomplish things you won't need me.
- Am afraid that if you accomplish things you'll be better than me.
- Am afraid that if you accomplish things you'll be too good for me.
- Need to be the center of attention.

If another's success makes us feel *less than*, we have to correct that within ourselves. It is our own spiritual error.

Example: Competition on the Strand

COMPETITION: When we first got together my wife suggested that we walk on the Strand in Hermosa Beach where we lived. The first time we went out she was power walking. Her inseam is six inches longer than mine and power walking was not what I agreed to. When she power walks, I'm

running to keep up. So after the second time out I politely declined her invitation. She later admitted that though she truly wanted to walk with me, was compelled to walk faster than I each time I caught up to her. It was, as she described, an irresistible urge to win.

TAKING JOY: When my wife was recovering from a hip injury in 2005, part of her physical therapy was to walk and she asked me to join her. We discussed my apprehension given the past and she promised not to walk so fast and instead, to focus on enjoying the surroundings. (The fact that she was temporarily disabled was helpful until the new behavior was established.) I agreed to walk a little faster than my usual saunter for the aerobic benefits.

We also decided to use the time to share our day, talk out any concerns, leave them on the sidewalk, and enjoy one another. Today, we still walk at least two miles a day and hold hands while walking - simple touching is tremendously important in any love relationship and it is all too easy to allow it to slowly disappear. These daily walks have become an established priority - an accomplishment of togetherness that melds exercise, one-on-one time, enjoyment of fresh air and nature, and non-territorially ensconced discussions.

Week 9 Practice

Non-Negotiable 9 Practice

1. Share three areas you feel in competition with your partner.
2. Share three things your partner has accomplished that you admire.
3. Share one dream you would like to be supported in during the mid-week check in.

Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day.

Responsibility vs. Irresponsibility

Response-ability means the ability to respond appropriately to those we are in relationships with. It not only requires being present, being in the here and now; it requires being spiritually centered.

If we are not present, we are not able to respond appropriately because we're missing the real situation. If we are not spiritually centered, we may operate out of fear, need or conditioning and find ourselves being rude, aggressive, oppressive, dishonest, manipulative, expectant, un-accepting, crowding, or competitive. These are all irresponsible behaviors.

We are reacting out of our human conditioning rather than spontaneously responding to the requirements of the moment.

As stated in the introduction, one definition of life is an organism that is able to respond to its environment. As I increase in responsibility I increase how alive I am.



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Responsibility

Responsibility

Responsibility includes:

- Consistency of effort (being alert for emotion, for slipping out of our spiritual center).
- Following up (if you say you're going to do something "later," set a definite time to do so).
- Sincerity (maintaining an honest intent to adhere to all 10 NNs).
- Willingness to change (vs. fear of change).
- Patience, with each other and with ourselves.
- We need to schedule and prioritize so we have time in which to be responsive.
- Taking responsibility for our own actions.
- If we hurt someone, responsibility says we make amends. We take steps to restore the peace and clean up the mess.
- I am not the cause of anyone else's pain, but I am response-able to clean up after my own actions.
- No one is cause for my pain. My reaction caused my pain. I am responsible for correcting my own spiritual errors.

"I will be responsible in all my relationships."

Irresponsibility

Irresponsibility

Irresponsibility is not being able or willing to respond.

Examples of irresponsibility are:

- Not trying
- Not caring
- Not showing up
- Insincerity
- Inertia
- Fear of change
- Impatience
- Being too busy
- Being inconsistent

“No relationship can survive my being irresponsible.”

What Prevents Responsibility?

What prevents responsibility?

- When I'm afraid of not getting it right. I believe that if I do nothing at all, I won't do anything wrong.
- When I'm afraid to change.
- When I need to be taken care of.
- When I'm totally self-centered.
- When I am not spiritually centered enough to be responsible.
- When I am unable to respond when asked due to poor time management, or scheduling skills.
- When I believe that when I act irresponsibly it will not affect the relationship.

Example: Irresponsibility by Over-scheduling

IRRESPONSIBILITY: For years I did not realize that my over scheduling had exactly the opposite effect of what I intended. I thought I was being of maximum service but what I was really doing was tearing about stressed and agitated. I could not see it. My loved ones were aggravated by my not being on time and resented that I was not able to be truly present

when I was with them. Even when I was there, I wasn't there. I was either apologizing for being late or my mind was on my next activity.

RESPONSIBILITY: Identifying what was truly important was helpful. Learning to schedule my time with my daughter or wife first, instead of trying to fit them in to my schedule, seemed difficult, but made a huge difference. Getting rid of my TV drew me closer to my daughter and required us to engage with each other during weekend visits.

Next, I had to learn that the success of my day was not dependent on the number of tasks I completed. Learning to accept that whatever was accomplished was exactly what was supposed to be accomplished was vital.

Meditation gave me that nanosecond of "pause" that allowed me to gradually learn to respond, rather than react in any given situation.

A daily meditation practice gives me the ability to grow in awareness of my relationship with myself and others. It helped me transition from a human doing to a human being. The ability to respond to each moment, as opposed to react, permanently altered my life experience.

Week 10 Practice

Non-Negotiable 10 Practice

1. Choose 3 areas that my busy-ness impacts my relationship.
2. Choose 3 areas that I would like to become more response-able.
3. Share your findings with your partner during the mid-week check in.

Reminder: Meditate together
at least five minutes every day.



Jay Stinnett is based in Redondo Beach, CA , working with couples and groups worldwide via conference call, Skype or Facetime.



If you would like Jay to privately guide you through Loving Sober's 12 week program, facilitate a weekend or week long Loving Sober™ retreat for your group, or speak at your event, please contact him at jay@lovingsober.com