

# Freedom Through Intimacy

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**INTEGRALPOST**  
Transmissions from the Leading Edge

Intimate relationship promises much, but only delivers what we put into it. We need to ask not only what we want from such relationship, but also what we are willing to do to manifest that. Wanting to be cocooned or secured through relationship is very different than wanting to be healed, awakened and deepened through relationship. If we really want the latter, we need to open to what it will—and *has to*—ask of us, knowing that it won't necessarily be an easy ride, at least not until we are stably established at a being-centered stage of relationship.

Of course, if it were easy, we likely would have done it long ago. But, as we shall see, it is the very difficulties that arise as we more deeply enter relationship which provide most of the raw material for reaching the depth and ease of relationship for which we yearn.

We want so damn badly to *really* get it right in our relationships, as is so exhaustively demonstrated by all the books and television shows about how to have better relationships, all the songs of heartache and break and mend, all the hunting and hoping and groping for that special somebody who'll do right by us, all the efforting, manipulation, self-marketing, and strategizing to get it right, to get it to last, to get it to really satisfy—all of it sentenced to the labour of making us feel better or at least more sure or secure, consuming more of our attention and energy than we'd bargained for, leaving us burdened and bewildered and close to not much more than depression and burnout, yet still hot-wired to enough paint-by-numbers relationships advice to be marooned from the fact that real relationships, relationships rooted in love and a mutual commitment to waking up, are not only less nice and more challenging than we thought, but also more *messy* (like this sentence).

Sloppy dialogue, emotional illiteracy, go-nowhere arguments, little cruelties, everyday stupidities, mismatched desires, mechanical rituals, halfheartedness, putting off what needs to be done—these are some of the things that clutter many relationships. They resist the vacuuming of good intentions. They resist both rational persuasion and emotional pleas. They go wherever we go, following us into and out of our dreams. At essence, however, they are just longtime habits tracking mud and worse into our shared space, while masquerading as us. If left undealt-with, this leaves our lives debilitatingly messy, no matter how well-scrubbed our place and face is. But in the messiness-*including* integrity and vitality of truly authentic relationship, such habits become nakedly obvious, clashing and colluding with each other before a *mutually* knowing eye, clearly needing more than a laundry spin, more than a communications course, more than better table manners. Such habits have gotten away with referring to themselves as us, but now cannot do so for long, as we, more and more, learn to relate *to*, rather than *from*, them.

Intimate relationship not only includes the mingling and encounter of differences, but also, sooner or later, catalyzes a blatant exaggeration or flaring-up of differences, a vividly dramatized exposure—however unwittingly animated!—of various oppositions, impasses, difficult mixes, and overdefended positionings that would have otherwise more than likely remained more camouflaged or untouched.

As unpleasant as this might feel—and the worse it feels, the more valuable it likely is—it signals a great opportunity to know ourselves more fully, because so much of what needs to be worked through for our own maturation is right before us, literally upfront and in our face, inviting us, for starters, to openly face it.

Intimate relationship thus provides an environment, both outer and inner, wherein what we do not like or do not want to know—or simply do not know—about ourselves is given center stage, just like in a dream. And there we may stand or stumble, seemingly transfixed by the spotlight, held in place both by our attachment to the other and to our own ideologies, feeling the heat of our preferences starting to flame into reactivity.

And this point, where we'd typically just trot out our usual roles—the misunderstood one, the victim, the reasonable one, etcetera—is precisely where even a *trace* of wakefulness is of immense use, to inwardly acknowledge not only our state, but also our degree of *identification* with that state. When a *mutually* compassionate eye can be cast upon the highlighted reactivity of one or both partners, the relationship is on course.

But as good as it gets, intimate relationship still can be a two-headed hell-raiser. There are times when the shared heart is split into two densely-walled camps; there are times when the shared body is a vacant lump; there are times



when the shared limitations are just a royal pain in the shared ass; there are times when the shared boundlessness is just an idea; there are times when the shared mortality is but a tenured deadening; there are times when the shared being is crowded with loneliness; there are times when the shared yes is riddled with doubt. The good news is that such times are fierce teachers, testers and potential deepeners of our faith, inviting us to get back on track.

When we are intimate with another, we can be very, very hurt. We can become crazily jealous, possessive, obsessed, angry in ways we never thought possible, our spiritual practices shredding into near nonexistence in the storms of our pain and reactivity. It might seem under such conditions that our capacity for awakening has been severely diminished, but that is from the viewpoint that sees only the turbulence, the chaos, the unpleasantness of what is happening. However, in such rough and wild waters swirls another possibility, one equipped with nothing but a lifeline to our heartland. If we take hold of it, we start to recognize what's right about what's wrong; we treat the shit as compost; we let the pain tear open our heart; we learn to love when we are not being loved or don't feel loved, and to give what we ache to be given.

However, if we only try to *think* our way through our relationship hassles, we merely confine their turbulent forces in our minds, thereby intensifying our confusion, instead of letting such forces fuel our leap into a more fitting level of being, recognizing and treating relational intimacy not as an end, but rather as a means, an extremely potent crucible for awakening's alchemy.

When we stop caring so much about who's right, we find enough heart to recognize what's right about what's wrong, allowing ourselves to be more comfortable with the uncomfortable, including the fear of being so close and connected that even a small unkindness from our partner cuts us. This is not about being oversensitive, but *vulnerable*. A relationship that lacks vulnerability is a relationship sentenced to the shallows.

We do, however, need to be careful about our possible egoic investment in having a "deep" relationship—there is nothing like an intimate relationship to let us know that we're not as developed as we may have thought!

We might, in meditative retreat or metaphysical flight, assume without much challenge that we are indeed sitting with our less-than-admirable qualities, being mindful of them, and so on, but real relationship does not waste much time in letting us know the difference between sitting *with* such qualities and sitting *on* them.

Entering such relationship is generally a rude awakening. It steps on the toes of our egoity, unimpressed by our credentials, drawing us into an evolutionary drama in which our neuroses initially get to star as us, and then are divested of such pretension, becoming but grist for the mill of awakening. To the degree that we are attached to our egoity and neurotic rituals, a relationship will, more often than not, seem like just one insult after another.

The sooner we ask what's right about what's wrong in our relationships, the sooner we'll discover the real value and purpose of them.

This may mean approaching our relationship in ways to which we are not accustomed. Sometimes being off our path *is* our path. Sometimes what works best is to spend some time in what doesn't work (this, however, does *not* mean we should be tolerant of abuse!). For example, watching the worst of television, as an alternative to meditation too rigidly adhered to, can be good medicine for spiritual constipation. We can get so busy trying to be good, trying to stay on the path, trying to be a successful somebody in a conscious relationship, that we stagnate, barely able to move beneath the sheer weight of all our documented failures.

Making discerning room for our intimate relationship to sometimes be somewhat messy—which does *not* mean making a virtue out of laziness, inconsiderateness, and mean-spiritedness!—helps keep it clean, undirtied by purity and the tyrannies of psychosocial correctness.

This does not, however, necessarily mean clear sailing. Any relationship can trigger us. Good relationships trigger the hell out of us without trashing the relationship; great relationships trigger the hell out of us while deepening the relationship. And the best relationships use whatever happens, however difficult or disheartening, not only to deepen the relationship, but also to awaken us beyond it.

What does not work in a relationship (assuming that neither partner is abusing the other), is what can make it truly work—especially in the sense of giving us sufficient jolts to alert us to our trances, consensual and otherwise—but *only if* such difficulties are dealt with by *both* partners not as problems, but as opportunities. Not easy, not easy at all. After all, this asks that we venture from the shoreline into some really big waves. We might then strengthen or more firmly anchor our bond with our partner; or we might finally see that we are not right for each other, no matter what we do; or we might start new practices together; or we might recognize that the depth of our love will sustain us through all, or that it is not enough to keep us together; and so on. No guarantees.

We can't connect unless we are already separate; and we can't separate unless we are already connected. Such is the apparent paradox of relationship. Real intimacy is the art of balancing togetherness and apartness, so that they are

not so much polar opposites as they are dance partners. The relationship is the dance floor; what we don't like about each other and ourselves the wallflowers; and the music and movement Life itself, at once outlasting us and appearing as us.

In the liberating bondage of real intimacy, our separateness is not a problem, but rather a ticket to real freedom, providing more than enough dissatisfaction and disillusionment to push us toward what we *really* need.

Part of what makes a relationship truly rewarding is an ongoing mutual intimacy with what doesn't work in the relationship, however small that might be.

The obstacles we encounter in relationship are not really obstacles, but catalysts in drag. Catalysts for what? For waking up. Be grateful to have someone so close to you who can so easily push your buttons—and maybe even install a few! It's not so easy to remain buttoned-up when we're in close to another. Healthy relationships don't let us remain intact, cool, immune. They kick our mutual butt with such fierce compassion that we can't sit for long on our stuff. How infuriating, how inconvenient, what a pain in the ass! And what a gift.

And what a wonderfully sobering and illuminating joy—to enter so deeply into shared living that *everything* is permitted to awaken us. And to be so close, so attached, so deeply bonded that we cannot get away for very long from the inevitable challenges of such relationship.

This is freedom, freedom *through* limitation, freedom through traveling together no matter what the weather.

Freedom through intimacy.

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