

A heart-shaped cloud is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image, set against a clear blue sky. Below the sky, a wide, light-colored gravel road stretches from the bottom center towards the horizon. The road is flanked by green grassy fields. In the distance, a line of trees marks the horizon under a sky with scattered, wispy clouds.

# TO HEAL OR NOT TO HEAL

Love's Better Direction  
in the Emotional World

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## TOGETHER

You and I by this lamp with these  
Few books shut out the world. Our knees  
Touch almost in this little space  
But I am glad I see you face.  
The silences are long, but each  
Hears the other without speech.  
And in this simple scene there is  
The essence of all subtleties.  
The freedom from all fret and smart,  
The one sure Sabbath of the heart.

The world—we cannot conquer it  
Nor change the mind of fools one whit.  
Here, here alone do we create  
Beauty and peace inviolate;  
Here night by night and hour by hour  
We build a high impregnable tower  
Whence may shine, now and again,  
A light to light the feet of men  
When they see the rays, thereof:  
And this is marriage, this is love.

*Ludwig Lewishon*

## DEDICATION

To each other, our children, our grandchildren and our friends

The very heart of our Emotional World

and

In memory of Addison

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## INTRODUCTION

In our experience committed relationships come in three varieties: Healing, Limp-along, and Destructive. We call these “Love Relationships.” Someone asked once, “How can you place ‘Destructive’ under the heading of a ‘Love Relationship?’” Easy. Here is the first teaching of this book: No one enters a relationship based on love and commitment with the hope that it will become destructive. Most people picture the future of their shared relationship as being healing, even if they would never use that word. Of course, most people don’t ask this question of themselves, “Do I have a good working model of a healing relationship in my head and in my heart?”

A majority of the people that we have seen over the past forty years lacked functional models for loving, accepting and healing relationships. Almost all of them longed for such relationships and they held pictures in their minds of what they should look like. Sometimes, this picture would be so resonant, so real that they would try to impose this reality on their partners. They never seemed to ask, “Do I have a good model to operate from or am I being obedient to my fantasies?”

This is not to say that people did not do their best. Certainly, the folks we have had the privilege to work with have done the very best they could with what they had. But if I am the child of an alcoholic, an abusive parent or a neglectful parent, I will grow up with a skewed picture of relationships, in regard to their healing potential.

In response to the misery or lack of life I observed in my own home, I might vow to have a different sort of life with better relationships. And this will be a solemn vow. But again, this resolve often lacks asking an important question, “Do I have a working model in my head of how relationships repair in order to return to a state of warmth during and after conflict?” That is one very important question.

People normally enter their closest relationships with the anticipation that they will be mutually beneficial and productive of happiness. In the delirium of love, they often think that this will be a durable drug, capable of removing hurt and misery from their lives. Or, they mistakenly think they will remove a lifelong misery from the life of their partner; that they will prove to be a loving person by “fixing” the other. Others believe that if they are properly loved, they will be “fixed.” This doesn’t happen, because it can’t.

Relationships don’t fix other people. But they can reach their highest calling by becoming vehicles of healing. But healing is voluntary. No one can impose healing upon us. We must seek it and be willing to submit to its dictates. And one of those dictates is that we need the help and guidance of others to learn the art of healing. It is not a practical outcome. If that were true

there would arguably be no divorce among the rich or successful. The healing arts have nothing to do with practical world arts, except we all have a baseline in the practical world so our most basic needs are met. Otherwise, all concentration will be devoted to the needs of survival.

If our love relationships do not become healing, then another more malevolent force often appears. They become a place of reenactment, where we battle with our loved ones in a vain attempt to correct our past. We often don't know this. It seems to us that we are perfectly willing to be engaged in the most healing of relationships, but our partner just will not get with the program. It does not occur to us that we are in a struggle with ghosts from the past. That may sound like so much psychobabble, but it's not.

Or, we go wrong because we are seeking to prove something taught to us long ago. "Men are no good." "You can't trust anyone." "Life is nothing but disappointment." "There is no happiness." "No one could ever love you." These are just a sampling of the core beliefs carried into relationships. They are powerful convictions. Make no mistake, people want to find that these beliefs are not true, but they often manipulate their partners to give them the exact messages they so much do not want to receive.

The good news is that powerful early negative messages or modeling are not predestination. Through our long years of experience, we know that it is possible to overcome the most difficult circumstances. We know that transformation is possible and that it happens all the time. It is possible to learn to love more deeply, not only the others in our lives, but ourselves as well. This is actually necessary. How can I love you in a healing manner, if I possess only a marginal tolerance for my own self? After all, what comes out of us is what we are full of. If a lot of anger or contempt comes toward you, guess what the other person is full of and vice versa.

Healing requires commitment. The first requirement is to understand how different it is from the concept of fixing. Fixing is the bane of the emotional world. You can fix stuff in the practical world. You cannot only fix it you can measure it and apply facts to it. When a survival situation arises, you can muster all of your energy and direct it at a single goal. Survival situations always have outcomes, some good and some not so good. Think living or dying.

But healing takes place in the emotional world it is not subject to the immediate will and could care less about facts. Healing in the emotional world is a process that takes place over time. It is very difficult to measure in our selves. The best information we can obtain about our healing is from others, by both their verbal and non-verbal responses to us. Becoming healed is a direction, not a place.

As will be explained in the following chapters all of us individually and in relationship are on a continuum, somewhere between healing and destructive. Where we are on that spectrum has a lot to do with the influences around us as we were growing up. None of us chose to be born into an abusive household with two alcoholic parents. But, if we were, then that is our starting place, our spot on the continuum.

What matters in our lives is that we now have choice. It may not seem like it. We may have built an entire reality around our current victimhood or the impossibility of change in our lives. Those are excuses. The truth is that old dogs can learn new tricks. They just have to want to learn and be willing to listen to a good trainer.

The choice that is open to us is to sit pat or turn in the direction of healing. And we can be determined to let nothing stop us. This is an issue of empowerment and agency. The important issue is direction. If we say there is no choice, then that is a decision to stay pat, to believe there are no life forces at work on our lives. It may seem obvious that everyone would choose to heal. In our minds, that might be so. However, without proper instruction we would be as uncomfortable being thrust into a healing situation as we would be on a dance floor with no knowledge of dancing.

Unfortunately, we cannot “jump.” We have to know where we are on that continuum and decide to move from there. We get to know a culture by living it. We learn a musical instrument by playing it, very badly at first. That’s how we learn a new thing. In a twist on an old saying, “If something is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.” There is no other way.

To be a healing influence in relationships is to be constantly learning and to be on a journey without end. The good news is that once you are hooked on that direction, nothing can turn you back. And you are invited. We offer ourselves as your guides.

## THIS BOOK

This book is in two parts. We are writing it because we have information and insights that have been helpful, very helpful to us in our own relationships. No model is perfect, but it is good for us to seek wisdom and guidance in life. We hope that what is written here will meet that highest of all standards when attempting to teach new concepts: common sense, leavened with compassion.

In the first part we will describe the three types of what we call love relationships. They are healing, Limp-along and Destructive. There are lots of connections we have in life with other people that require no insight or adaptation on our parts. Those of us with better intentions will be concerned that we are polite, even enjoyable for those who come in contact with us. But those interactions will not teach us much about our natures or our blind spots. Those are in the realm of our public lives where adherence to some form of social norm causes us to be sufficient.

But in our love relationships, it is much more complex. We don't have hopes that the porter will make us happy or that the hotel bellman will relieve us of our feelings of loneliness. There is no expectation that our butcher or the friendly UPS delivery person will create safety for our vulnerability. We don't expect to see our tax advisor sitting by our hospital bed when we wake up from surgery. Normally, that would not cause us to feel abandoned or betrayed.

Our love relationships hit all our nerves, both pleasant and painful. A seemingly innocent observation or a comment with an unintended tone of voice can transport us in a millisecond out of the present moment and into the past. To the astonishment or consternation of our loved ones, we wail in despair or respond with vengeful wrath. We seem not to make sense. Our response or theirs is stupefying. Actually, it's not.

We have just gone to our spot on the continuum. We may play a good and convincing act in our public roles, but those who know us intimately have seen our other "parts." And when we respond from one of those parts, we often trigger an ancient piece in our loved ones. And they go to their spot on the continuum. It all seems so "natural," if deeply unpleasant or painful. It feels unchangeable. Well, it's not natural. It is simply the domination of old habits. They are all changeable; allowing there are no organic or medical reasons why that cannot be so.

But you can't change unless you know where you are on the spectrum and have the desire and knowledge to move in the direction of healing relationships. It's like the old joke: How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one. But it costs a lot of money, it takes a long time and the light bulb has to really want to change. Amen.



The second part of this book is a primer on what we call the Survival World, the Emotional World and the Practical World. There is only an intersection of all three of these worlds in warm committed relationships of choice. Apart from those, we need to expect very little of others in the emotional world. This is important because the kind of healing we are talking about in this book takes place in what we call the emotional world. Some might want to call it the emotional/spiritual world. We have no argument with that.

These are three distinct worlds and they are just what they sound like. When the survival world shows up in the form of a child falling in a swimming pool or what appears to be a heart attack in an older woman, everything else stops until there is resolution. No one ever said to wait until the desert course to do the Heimlich maneuver on a choking granddad because it would be a shame to let dinner get cold. No. Everything stops, as it should. If grandfather gets unclogged everything goes back to normal.

Most of us recognize the survival world most of the time when it shows up. It is a truly dangerous situation when it appears but no one recognizes it and takes no action. Denial is often a handmaiden in this drama. "Oh, I don't think it's anything. Just a little nausea is all. If it gets worse, I'll call for help." Fortunately, the survival world usually announces itself so strongly as to abort all denial. The one rule of the survival world is action, hopefully the right one. Don't hesitate. Act quickly.

In the main, most of us recognize the practical world. We are socialized into it from a very early age. We do chores. We have homework. We go to school with its beginning and ending. There are expectations. If we meet them, there is hopefully a just reward commensurate with the task. We learn to bargain, to use facts and to think about the future and how to plan for it.

The main thing about the practical world is that stuff can be measured and fixed. It is a content world. The questions, "How much?" "How many?" and "When will it be done?" have great resonance in this world. This world has surprises, but it can offer the real feeling of life being predictable and under our control. Facts are very cool in this world.

None of this applies to the emotional world. We don't do the emotional world with an awfully lot of people. It takes commitment and a lot of work, plus a lot of time. This is very important. We need to engage in the emotional world only with those people for whom we have unconditional warmth. These are relationships of choice. And that choice needs to be conscious and clear.

There is a dividing line in life: there are those with whom we share the emotional world and there are those with whom we don't. By necessity the number of people in our own emotional world is quite small. We can be friendly with hordes and be very well known, even famous. But the number of those who know our joy and our suffering will only be a fraction of that number.

The reason it is vital to understand the three worlds as they relate to committed relationships is that most of us weren't so well trained in the emotional world. That's not a knock of those who raised us. They probably weren't so well trained either. This creates a problem. When the emotional world appears, we often use the tools of either the practical world or the survival world. That virtually never works to any real satisfaction.

Here is another learning. The words, thoughts, actions and tone that satisfy one world cannot satisfy another. Each world has its own vocabulary, its own language, its own nomenclature and its own criteria for being satisfied. To say to an upset weeping teenager, "But your family has plenty of money and you live in a nice house," will most likely not satisfy that scene. It would be absurd to say to a non-swimmer mother, "It must be very upsetting seeing your two-year old in the deep end of the pool." If she didn't take your head off, she would righteously shout at you, "Don't talk about feelings to me, jump into the pool and save my child."

Why? Because. The survival world is satisfied by action, not empathy. Empathy goes a long way in the emotional world. It doesn't hold a crucial place in either the survival world or the practical world. In the same way the weeping teenager would not feel much solace being reminded of the family's practical world standing. What satisfies one world does not satisfy another, no matter how sincere the effort.

We have two goals. Having helped you understand the concept of three love relationships and of the three worlds that make up our marriages and other committed ships, we want to help you with both. It is our goal that you will be able to recognize not only where you are on the spectrum between healing and destructive relationships but will also know where your parental figures were.

The second goal is to teach you about the three worlds so you can recognize which world is present and how to satisfy each one. If the emotional world is in the room and I am treating it like there is a solvable problem looking for a solution, I will look for a way to fix it. Here is another learning: We don't "fix" things in the emotional world. We fix plenty of stuff in both the survival world and the practical world, but not the emotional world.

We want you to have the tools to move your love relationships in the direction of healing and to become not only at ease in the emotional world, but to be an expert in it. Here is the last learning from this introduction: The most important skill in the emotional world is to learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. That's important. When I have that in my craw, I'll know when I just need to be empathically present to my loved ones, not jumping all over the place trying to fix the world or shouting the house down. Sounds simple. It's not. The good news is that it is all learnable and doable. Old dogs can most certainly learn new tricks. Young dogs can too.

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## PART ONE

### THE THREE LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

#### CHAPTER ONE

##### HEALING, LIMP-ALONG AND DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

**W**e have encountered very few people over the past forty years who entered into a marriage or a heart-felt friendship who had any goal other than that the relationship would be warm and fulfilling; healing in our words. The exception to this observation involved people with criminal, material, political or abusive intent, not likely clients to show up in our offices seeking help. The exception to that last sentence is the number of people who come to us because they find themselves in relationship with someone of abusive intent. The vast majority came to us flummoxed over the deep divisions and disagreements now present in relationships that had held such promise and commitment.

When people do present themselves for relationship counseling, they have often done a bit of “arm chair” counseling with themselves about their unhappy situation and have come up with a startling if inevitable conclusion, “The other party is most at fault for the fracturing of our relationship. After all I can see clearly all of my thwarted attempts to ameliorate the situation.” This is a common and intuitive conclusion, if patently incorrect.

It has often been noted that we need licenses for all sorts of things, driving, hunting, flying, and legions of professions. It makes sense. These licenses provide proof that the person has received proper training for a complex task that could possibly impact many other people. Other than a perfunctory marriage license, relationships require no training or certification, not to mention the awe-inspiring task of parenting. That is as it should be. However, that tends to underestimate how complex intimate relationships are by their very nature.

Most of us get trained up pretty well in how to maintain public relationships. We frequently hear reports from people about the large number of “friends” they have or their success in social clubs. Upon further inquiry we often discover that these people are confusing being an acquaintance with being in a devoted and committed friendship. There is a vast difference. The skills that satisfy our public relationships with their prescribed rituals and necessary superficiality are a far cry from those required for relationships that call for us to be open and vulnerable.

We see a common confusion. “If I am an expert in superficial relationships, I should be well qualified for the complexity of intimate relationships.” Again, that feels intuitive. However, we would never board a 747 knowing the pilot only had training in a single engine two-seater airplane, intuition or not. Here is a not so obvious truth:

**Successful intimacy requires lots of training beyond what was taught to us and what is intuitive to us.**

We see another common confusion. It is the belief that I can successfully use the skills obtained in the Practical World in the Emotional World and get a good outcome. More rarely, but just as fervently we encounter people who believe that they can use the skills of the Survival World in the Emotional World. One of the reasons these confusions are so prevalent is that lots of people have a degree of competence in those worlds.

Again, intuition says that what works in one world should work in another. And again, intuition is incorrect. The second part of this book will explore the three worlds in depth and what satisfies each. The three worlds are completely different and one world is not satisfied by the skills of another world. You will hear us say that last sentence over and over, perhaps *ad nauseum*. However, overcoming embedded intuitive behavior actually takes a lot of repetition. A lot.

## THE THREE RELATIONSHIPS

Now when we are talking about relationships here, we are not talking about casual relationships that are characterized by a lack of specific commitment and where people are only know in one or two dimensions. These are the people who populate our work, our churches, mosques, or synagogues, our neighbors and all other relationships that we call, “relationships of proximity.” These might be the source of present, past or future intimate relationship, but don’t meet the criteria for it in and of themselves.

We are concerned with intimate relationships or relationships that wish to be intimate. These are love relationships, or at least began as that, or had that as a stated goal. These are relationships that are not only proximate but have a higher standard of fulfillment. Stated or not these are relationships that yearn for vulnerability, empathy, acceptance, compassion, safety, honesty and warmth.

When those elements did not turn out to be present as hoped, that causes a crisis characterized by fear, distrust, disillusionment, hurt feelings and blame. This is not unlike finding out the pilot



of your 747 with the single engine training is not very comforting when you hit rough weather. It's a pretty good metaphor. "What do you mean you don't know how to fly this airplane?" That is not far off from what people say to each other, if not in those exact words.

It is our thesis that all committed relationships based on warmth, affection, attraction and free choice began with the hope and even the expectation that they would be healing in nature, even if the word "healing" was never used. We use the word because it calls to mind something that is alive, growing, adaptive, forgiving and capable of healing. And, as you will see, you can have a healing relationship that has nothing in common with previous perfectionistic fantasies. Really functional and happy love relationships are messy, but it is a messy that we want and we feel confident we can "fly." And those messy relationships have a way to return to their "sweet spot."

Thinking of the airplane example above, the late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir once said, "Getting old is like being on an airplane with engine trouble. It's uncomfortable, but there is no place else you can be." When great troubles come to our core relationships, it is uncomfortable, very uncomfortable. And, unlike being on an airplane, we can get off. But there is the rub. People get into these relationships with a lot of skin in the game. They wanted them to work and committed themselves as best they could. And if you get off this "plane" it doesn't guarantee you will get on a better one in the future. And, needless to say, there are usually lots of very compelling practical world reasons for staying on that particular plane.

So, what happens? When the dream of the healing begins to fade early training and early models begin to kick in, usually unconsciously. Lots of folks make the declaration, "I will never have a marriage like my parents." Of course, the problem with this is that the model for that marriage is right there in their heads. A second problem is that it declares what I will not have, as opposed to what I intend to learn to have. So as disillusion becomes more prevalent than hope people regress in order to cope. If this sounds a little complicated, well it is, but it is no less true for being complicated. Every person walks around with models in his or her head and those models are very compelling, especially in times of crisis.

It brings to mind the old saying, "If the only tool you have in your kit is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." For many folks, the "tools" they walk around with came from witnessing limp-along or destructive relationships. When crisis looms people naturally turn to their oldest and most basic tools. Folks dream of flourishing relationships but very few got to watch one from the front row seats and take notes. Unfortunately, a much larger portion of us were steeped in the ways of limp-along and destructive relationships.

If that sounds pessimistic, it is not meant to be. We have discovered few things as discouraging for people as their failure to live up to their own expectations. This is especially true when it comes to relationships, both to their own learned abilities and to that of their partners. To most people it would seem absurd to being able to speak fluent Chinese or Italian, having never been raised exposed to those languages. It would be clear that there would be a learning process needing lots of coaching and education. Progress would be slow at first and awkward, but success in the learning would provide great encouragement.

It is likewise unrealistic to have the expectation that one should be in John Gottman's words, "A master of marriage," if one grew up with the "Bickersons" or in the home of an active alcoholic. But that is just what happens. This lack of appreciation for the power of early modeling cripples many relationships. The brutality of failed expectation falls either on the person or the partner, or both. No one would ever say, "If my partner was different, I could speak Chinese." Or, "If I can just be more demanding and critical of myself, I would know how to speak Italian."

It takes great courage and determination to learn how to overcome our early imprinting in order to learn how to offer and receive healing in relationships, in the emotional world. It is a new language. And it is a new set of skills.

Like any new language or set of skills, it is easy to become discouraged if the goals set are unrealistic as to the starting place. On the other hand, making improvement and progress is very encouraging and motivating. In learning this new language and set of skills it is important to be moving in the right direction as the primary motivator. So as not to foster undue discouragement it is imperative to know the starting point of the journey.

No matter where one starts from moving in the direction of flourishing engenders the feeling of success. Being mired in the mud of a limp-along relationship with no movement reinforces a needless sense of hopelessness. Feeling the pull ever in the direction of a destructive relationship engenders despair and rage.

The direction and fact of movement are vital. The first task is to assess where each member of the relationship appears on the continuum we will describe in the next chapter. Then it is possible to know the size of the task and to be able to recognize movement both in oneself and in our loved ones.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FINDING YOUR SET POINTS ON THE SPECTRUM

**W**e like parents. We are parents. We are grandparents. We like “to parent,” that is to nurture, encourage and nourish affectionate relationships of healthy dependency. We love helping to create atmospheres that are safe, accepting and promote the discovery of personality and individual traits. We love helping people turn their homes into warm havens from the outside world where the most predominant characteristics are trust and emotional security.

We certainly realize that many people were not raised in the idyllic atmosphere described in the preceding paragraph. We know that many people grew up in circumstances that had more in common with a battlefield or a reformatory than a warm warren of acceptance and flexibility. We are aware that many people grew up in situations where the parents wanted them to be better than they were but were compromised by the habits of perfectionism and over-expectation.

We believe this to be true: Most parents did the best they could with what they had. We are not against parents of origin or blameful toward them. It is not difficult to discern the theme of blame toward parents, implicitly or explicitly, in a lot of psychotherapy literature. It is not that all parents do not commit errors or make profound mistakes in the process of parenting. Parents do. There is little to argue with in the ancient observation, “The sins of the father are passed to the son.”

The issue is intentionality. Unless mental illness is involved, we find little evidence of parents intentionally wishing to harm or blunt their children’s lives. And if mental illness or severe addiction were involved, then the will of the parents was subverted. In some forms of therapy, the parents become the scapegoats to be defied or blamed. For us, this represents misdirection of valuable information and of expended energy. We have never seen anyone benefit in the long term from having a “justified anger” at someone from their past.

Having said all that, we think it is essential to be able to take stock of one’s past as it relates to life today. The past contains a wealth of information. It is good to be curious about the information contained there and, even more importantly, the modeling that was presented. All humans learn by imitation. It is natural to imitate, consciously or unconsciously, the behaviors and attitudes of early parental figures.

Many people before Galileo's time truly believed the earth was flat. Their teachers had believed it and their teachers before them had believed it. It was also embedded in the dominant western religious thought of the middle ages. This did not make it true but it did not keep a lot of very smart people from trying to make it true.

Homes of origin can be like that. Some of us were not only taught that the earth is flat, but we were also given the arguments to shore up that belief, sometimes vehemently. As the astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson said, "The good thing about science is that it is true whether you believe in it or not." Again, very few parents wish to harm their children with misinformation about the world or about relationships. There is just a lot of teaching passed on of what was taught before them, even if the data no longer holds up. Data has a hard time making a mark on intuitive beliefs. But our job in this work is to challenge and even change some intuitive beliefs.

It is important to have the tools to evaluate what we were taught while growing up, both intentionally and unintentionally. Again, let us emphasize, this has nothing to do with blame or feeling like a victim. It is necessary and it can answer a lot of questions never understood before. It can be an adventure of discovery. It has been for us.

## THESE ARE LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

In talking about the three types of relationships outlined in the first chapter it is imperative that we emphasize again that all three of them—healing, limp-along and destructive—are love relationships. Now, when a relationship has deteriorated to the point of being unquestionably a "destructive" relationship it does not appear to be "loving" in the conventional sense of the word. But it was founded on the belief and hope of love. The deterioration may be as baffling to the couple involved as to the people (children, friends, relatives) compelled to watch it.

In the same way, a "limp-along" relationship may seem devoid of much life. It may appear boring, repetitive and lacking in excitement. There may be about it the quality of a less-than-happy situation. There may be a passive acceptance of the status quo even though it lacks active happiness. It might be encased in a morbid sense of humor that reinforces the concept that it is silly to wish for better in a relationship. There may be about it the quality of defeat and of being resigned.

But, on the bright side these relationships often seem durable and assured of continuance. They might be less than exciting but no one seems to be in a hurry to change the status quo. Upon closer examination almost all limp-along relationships evince a sense of loss. Something that was

fondly wished for did not work out well as hoped. However, it should be noted that for some couples accomplishing a stable limp-along relationship is a vast improvement over their beginnings and represents a victory to be proud of.

Obviously, “healing” relationships bear many of the hallmarks most people associate with “love.” It is possible to read in the chart below some of the salient characteristics of all three relationships on a number of different aspects. For some reading the characteristics ascribed to healing relationships, it may sound a bit idealistic and perhaps unrealistic. To some these characteristics will sound insincere, even manipulative. Actually, the characteristics of a healing relationship as described below are realistic and appropriate goals for all love relationships, whether they are formally committed or a deep friendship.

As the title of the book says, “To Heal or Not to Heal.” Well that title implies choice. That is the goal of this book, to create choice. We want for people involved in love relationships to be able to choose to be a healing force; and to know how. Again, most people dream that a relationship will be healing, whether that word is ever used or not. However, if the only “language” I know is “poison,” “control,” or “defensiveness,” it would be very hard to participate in a healing process.

There is a vast difference between “fixing” and “healing.” In the second half of this book on the Emotional World, we will talk at length about that difference. Suffice it to say for now that it is not possible to “fix” someone you love and it is not possible for that person to do that for you. You will hear this repeated a great deal in this book. We find it important to repeat certain things with great frequency.

Just as it is clearly possible for relationships to be very detrimental and debilitating, it is possible for them to be healing in nature as well. It is possible for them to grow. It is possible for them to move in the direction of healing. Indeed, it is a healing all of us long for, even if a great number of people don’t know they long for it. We often say to people, repeatedly, we are teaching you to have something you have never seen. The attributes in the healing column are not “pie-in-the-sky,” but the very real elements of relationships that can heal us as well as those whom we love.

Here is the chart that we have worked out over the years as we have observed couples in all three styles of relationship. You will immediately notice that relationships are not very “obedient” to charts and that there are some traits from one column and some from another that describe the relationship you are evaluating.

At the bottom of the chart is the item titled, “The Spectrum.” This is a very important concept. As you can see from the overlapping lines these lists in the columns can overlap with one another.



That is, limp-along can overlap with both destructive and with healing relationships. You will also notice that healing and destructive relationships do not, cannot overlap with one another. They are on opposite ends of the spectrum and share no enduring features with one another.

Now each can look like the other for brief moments. The alcoholic couple who are able to clean up for a few hours and be charming at their daughter's wedding can appear healthy for a bright brief moment. In the same way people in healing relationship can have moments of anger or being distraught that they look momentarily destructive. The key word in both instances is "momentarily." Before the passage of very much time that which is enduring reasserts itself. The alcoholic couple melts into a boozy hostile puddle and the flourishing couple responds as if an alarm bell has gone off. They put the fire out before it has barely started. And both return to their established position on the spectrum.

Here is the chart. As you study it, consider three things: what defines where you are in your current love relationships, what defined where your modeling relationships resided and where are you in relationship with yourself. That's a lot. Look at the chart and see if it makes intuitive sense to you.

ASPECTS OF EACH:	HEALING RELATIONSHIPS	LIMP-ALONG RELATIONSHIPS	DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS
The nature is	Warm	Cool	Hostile
The relational drive is	To enjoy/restore contentment	To fix (the other or the situation)	To dominate & humiliate
Boundaries are	Stable/protective	Rigid/reliable	Fluid/loose
Vulnerability is	Welcomed	Unsettling	Despised
Warmth is	Durable/dependable	Fragile/sporadic	Missing or dying
Recovery is	In real time	Delayed (if at all)	Not possible
Switching and apology are	Probable, sincere, and timely	Possible (with qualifications)	Tantamount to defeat
Curiosity is focused on	Emotions and how to share	Facts and how to apply	Who is to blame and why
Empathy is	Unconditional	Conditional	Foreign

The cycle is	Rebirth, renewal and recalibration	Frozen in time & needs a crisis	A powerful downward spiral
Forgiveness is	Desired as a means to reconciliation	Difficult and formulaic	Equivalent to condoning evil
The primary lens:	Admiration	Evaluation	Suspicion
The intention is	To be kind	To be dutiful	To be malicious
Nature of effort	Work with ease	Struggle	Exhausting
Physical affection	Abundant	Awkward	Withheld
Listen in order to	Understand	Defend/explain	Refute/accuse
Memory and memories are	Cherished, enhance fondness	Focused on facts as defenses or attacks	Sources of “justified” rage
Conflict	Is resolved & builds confidence	Reveals despair & feeling stuck	Is an excuse to be cruel or a victim
Working mantra	“It’s not personal”	“Fix it or ignore it”	“You will not win”
Sense of trust is	A pleasure	More concrete	Extinct
Humor is	Self-deprecating, inclusive	Formulaic/jokes, other focused	Missing or demeaning
Sexuality is	Mutual/intimate A source of richness	More stereotypical A source of longing	A weapon/a lure A source of danger
Hostility and contempt	Are quickly quenched/replaced	Smolder in the background	Are a contagion waiting to pounce
Emotional power is expressed thru	Tenderness with curiosity	Complaint with evidence	Chaos with vindictiveness

The last item on the chart is “The Spectrum.” As you think about the important relationships you witnessed as you were growing up, what qualities stand out about those relationships? If you were to pick a spot on the spectrum, where would they be? Did you grow up in a healing, a limp-along or destructive household? And there is a spectrum in each of these categories. A limp-along relationship might be happily inclined toward healing or it might be evolving downward toward destructive. Even in the destructive category, there is mild to severe. Using your

objective insights in collaboration with your intuition, place that observed relationship on the spectrum. It might be the average of the two people observed. They weren't necessarily in exactly the same spot on the spectrum.

Wherever that spot is, that was your starting place. You were taught how to handle life in the emotional world from that place.

Now do the same with your spouse or significant other. There is no right or wrong here. No blame. This inexact process is very important. It tells you where you both began. It is not a judgment. It is not a sentence declaring that this is where you will always be. It does not question the sincerity of your longing to have much more than you saw and experienced while growing up. It is your starting point and your partner's point is their starting point. It is not a contest to see who has the "better" starting point. It is a fact of your life and the other person's life. Properly understood, it is a source of relief and instruction.

Here is another learning from this book that will be often repeated: You cannot jump.

What does that mean? It simply means that we are not destined to stay in the same spot on the spectrum, but we cannot "jump" to a much more desired spot. It makes sense. If we grew up in a destructive household, we may desire with our whole hearts to live out a better relationship than the one we witnessed. But all of our known tools are clustered around that style of relationship. We have to learn new tools.

This makes sense to anyone embarking on learning a complex task. If one wants to be a topnotch calligrapher in Japan, it involves years of apprenticeship, regardless of latent talent. Perhaps the exception to this rule is the occasional prodigy such as Mozart who wrote his first symphony at age five. If there are relational prodigies out there, we haven't seen them. As in anything in life, there are those who are more fortunate than others. The most fortunate grew up amidst flourishing relationships. The least fortunate grew up in circumstances that were traumatizing and harsh.

There is one other important reason to know one's starting point. In times of emotional crisis there is an almost irresistible draw to return to that spot. It is a common human trait. When an event is painful enough to push us to an earlier point in our time, we reach for what was a source of comfort at that time, not the skill we learned last week. We often warn couples after what has appeared to be a very successful session where new learning and insight have occurred, "Be aware that if you have a crisis this week, you will handle it in the old way, not the new way you learned today." This usually brings a laugh and relief. It takes time to incorporate new ways.

Our set points are moveable, but they are very stubborn and they can reappear in stressful moments.

The issue is not being somehow perfect and never blundering back into our original set points. It is how long we feel stuck there before realizing that we don't have to stay there and that we have an entire new set of skills to deal with this very stress in a much better way. When that happens, we are heading in the right direction: toward the world of flourishing relationships. But it is imperative we not live in denial about our original set point.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IT IS ALL ABOUT DIRECTION

**W**e are big fans of John Gottman and his research concerning how to be a successful couple. In one of his lectures we were struck by a set of his statistics: “If a person thinks, because of prominent physical symptoms, that he might have heart problems, he will seek treatment in a month. If a woman thinks that she could possibly have cancer because of the appearance of physical symptoms, she will seek medical advice in three months. If a couple becomes aware that there are patterns of unresolved conflict and of a lack of warmth in their marriage, symptoms that could severely harm or even destroy their relationship, they will seek treatment in five years.” Wow.

He went on to talk about how couples’ therapy and divorce are correlated. Now it is important to understand the difference between correlation and causation. When we were young and growing up in the fifties, heart disease was correlated with owning a Cadillac or some other model of expensive car. Expensive cars did not cause heart disease. Heart disease was then what it is now, more common in older people. At that time in history, more expensive cars tended to be owned by older people who had accumulated a certain amount of wealth.

Couples therapy does not cause divorce, but it is true what John Gottman observed. It takes a lot of hurt and pain to overcome the denial that nothing is wrong. A lot. So, when people reach the threshold of our doors, it is usually true that a lot has been going wrong for a long time. In our conceptualization, we would say that the dreams of a healing relationship seem more remote, while feeling a stronger and unwelcome pull toward more intuitive and unhelpful strategies. Frustration ensues.

Another interesting reason that it often takes so long to get to couples’ therapy is because so many people are smart. Very often one smart person is married to another smart person. We see people who are used to figuring out complex issues and problems. We see people who are very good at what they do. “How hard could it be to figure out what is going on and fix it?” Actually, it is very hard, not unlike trying to be your own dentist. As one wag once said, “It is hard to see the picture when you are standing in the frame.”

People do figure out what is wrong in their relationships, at least from their very well-reasoned out perspective. It almost always comes down to some variant of: “If my partner would just cooperate with my view of what needs to change, we would be fine.” There is an obvious problem with this solution. To be fair, some more enlightened and self-critical individuals take



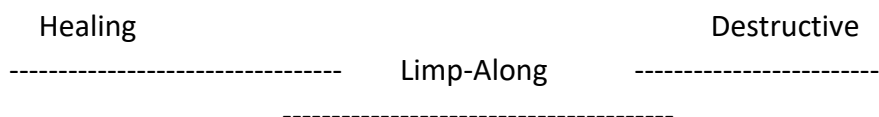
the problem onto their own shoulders, thinking, “If only I was different, we would be fine.” But this is also incorrect because we are like a school of fish to some degree. As a group we are moving in one direction. If we are to change direction, we must also do that like a school of fish. We first have to see what direction the “school” is going in.

This brings us to what we call the “Three rules of the Spectrum.”

**Couples cannot move in the direction of healing on the spectrum without knowing/intuiting their own starting point; otherwise they will be constantly frustrated with self/partner due to dashed expectations.**

A continual theme of this book is the importance of knowing your own set point. It is actually essential because not knowing your own or that of your partner leads to needless frustration with yourself, your partner and your relationship. After all, if you knew yourself to be five foot eight inches tall, you would not feel crushed by never becoming a star center on a professional basketball team.

Now, one’s height is an inherent quality and not subject to change. Knowing your set point, copied from your parental models only feels inherited. “That’s just the way I am.” Fortunately, that is not true. We can most certainly change our set points, just as surely as we can lose weight, get in better physical condition, learn a new language or learn new vocational skills. The only thing those four examples have in common is that they all take dedicated work, involve outside information and only happen if a person is motivated. If someone wants to learn a new language, it is pretty clear where the set point is and what progress looks like from that set point. If you recall, at the bottom of the chart in the previous chapter describing Flourishing, Limp-along and Destructive relationships there were three overlapping lines like this:



That brings us to rule number two.

**Healing relationships and destructive relationships can overlap with either end of limp-along relationships on each end of its spectrum; but healing and destructive never overlap one another.**

Properly understood this simple little three-line chart above can relieve a great deal of frustration and guilt. As silly as it is as an example, if I really don't know I am five foot eight then I might well suffer from dashed self-esteem at my inability to play center on the basketball team. I will have saddled myself with an impossible expectation. If I truly don't see where I am on that spectrum, I might even begin to believe that I am not a center because of the bad intentions of other people. In the same way it is so important to see where we started in life in terms of our early instruction regarding relationships. This is our "inherited" spot and our other loved ones have their own too. The combination of two spots on the spectrum averages out into our position as a couple. No one is to blame for his or her place on the spectrum unless you can blame another person for the home or situation they were born into.

This has nothing to do with finding someone in the past to blame; or in the present. It has to do with common sense. All dreams of having a flourishing relationship are worthy and good. But we have to know the facts of the situation in order to be prepared for the journey. One of the most important facts is that it is not possible to "jump" on the spectrum, no matter how sincere the desire.

If you are lost in a swamp in the night and you see a light far off, you know someone is giving the sign that you are found and have a direction. Your spirit soars but the very next step you take will still be in muck up past your ankles. Only now you are headed in the right direction instead of going in circles.

This brings us to the third rule.

**Movement in a positive direction on the spectrum lends confidence to a relationship ("We are headed in a good direction.") and is more important to the health of the relationship than the specific point on the spectrum at any given moment in time.**

We have found that one of the greatest tyrannies in life is that of expectation. If, as the old saying goes, "Perfect is the enemy of good," then a corollary is, "Expectation is the enemy of good progress." So many people expect more of themselves or of their partners than what is possible.

Of at least, what they are wanting is not possible in the next moment or the next week. This again has to do with where the set points are.

The title of our book is about healing. It is possible for our love relationships to be healing and that is the goal of this book. But it is important to know what healing looks like. It is also critical to know the difference between healing and fixing. Where we are on the spectrum is not the important issue, other than it can inform us of how much we might have to learn. The crucial issue is movement along the spectrum.

In our observations of couples over the past forty years we have found that couples are either getting better or they are getting worse. Now lots of people in limp-along relationships look as if they are erected in granite, unmoving, eternal and the same today as yesterday, but it's not true. In our love relationships healing is either taking place and characterizes the relationship or it is not and that characterizes the relationship.

Relationships are dynamic. That is, they are living entities with stages. They have beginnings, middles and ends. It is good to be lucky in life. It is good to have many more positive things happen than bad. It is better to possess good health. It is better to be prosperous than struggling. But these external influences only go so far. We have all known miserable people living in castles and happy contented people who possess much less.

The issue is the movement of the direction on the spectrum. Are we being pulled by events and our own spot on the spectrum in the direction of a destructive relationship or are we a growing learning couple? Just as individuals have self-esteem, so do couples. And just as in individuals that self-esteem doesn't come from events following our plans, but from our resiliency in overcoming hardship and unexpected challenge.

People moving in the direction of healing don't always have their way. Life is no more under their control than for anyone else. They are subject to the same stresses, the same pressures and disappointments as everyone else. What they do possess is an abundance of confidence in their ability to meet challenge with change. They reinvent themselves. We will talk about this a great deal throughout the book.

The important point here is that people either garner disappointment over time because they never reach the expectations in their minds; or they learn to take comfort from evidence of love and moving in the direction of learning. People, couples aren't confident because everything went according to their plan. They are confident because every time they were knocked down, they found a way to get back up. They come to see these difficult occasions as opportunities to

push the boundaries of what they know. They are confident in their ability to adapt to new situations and in the process, learn more about each other and themselves.

In closing this chapter on the importance of direction, here are two more sets of three that we believe to be vital. If you do not know these simple observations it may be handicapping you in being a “forward mover” in your love relationships.

## SET POINTS

All love relationships have a set point on the spectrum and are a combination of the heritable set points of both individuals.

It is possible to move set points in a positive direction by changing old beliefs and creating new habits, thereby establishing new set points that will be as durable as the prior ones.

It is not possible to “jump” set points forward, as opposed to a gradual movement in a positive direction with commitment and help; but it is possible to temporarily “jump” backwards to an earlier set point in moments of stress.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

I can “fix” someone else, or someone else can “fix” me.

Substantial positive changes in the material/practical world will permanently “jump” the set point of a relationship toward healing.

I believe myself willing and able to be in a healing relationship (in spite of my own set point), but my partner always seems to hold us back by refusing to make the necessary changes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LOVE RELATIONSHIPS HAVE SELF-ESTEEM

It is clear that individuals have levels of self-esteem, ranging from low to high. In the same way, a person can usually offer an assessment of how much confidence in the world he or she possesses. There are legions of self-help books on the market offering advice on how to raise self-esteem and increase one's confidence.

Well, the same is true for couples and other relationships bonded by commitment and warmth. And, it is an intriguing concept. We didn't really have any difficulty in naming two of our categories, specifically "limp-along" and "destructive." But we struggled for a long time to find a phrase that captured what we have come to call "flourishing" relationships.

We did finally come to settle on that phrase, but not without some misgiving. Our concern was not its accuracy. There are certainly marriages and friendships that truly flourish. It was the utter positivity of the phrase. It would not be hard for some people to see this as yet one more ideal to compare to their own lives and come up short: one more "Barbie Doll" that says I don't meet a standard. Coming up short in a comparison is one of the most effective ways to dash someone's self-esteem.

The moment that comparison comes into play, self-esteem and confidence may suffer. The same is true for expectation. It is not that either comparison or expectation is bad. It is how they are used when self-esteem is involved. The same is true with pride. There is a healthy pride that says, "I am proud of my efforts or my values." There is another sort of pride that says, "I feel good because my house isn't just nice, it's nicer than yours." It is a comparative pride and the good feeling it brings comes at a cost of always having to win a comparative battle.

When any couple begins to compare themselves to an ideal, their self-esteem as a couple will suffer. There is a good reason why Benjamin Franklin said, "To be happy, don't compare and don't compete." This is true in comparing ourselves to other individuals and their accomplishments, or our relationships to what we imagine to be the relationships of others. We often caution the people who work with us, "Don't compare your 'insides' to other peoples' 'outsides.'" This is especially true with expectation.

Expectation is either our servant or our master. It is our servant if it gives a sense of direction, of a goal worth stretching ourselves in order to obtain. The moment it becomes a reminder of how I have fallen short, it becomes our master and never allows us to feel satisfied. Expectation in

this regard never takes into account a person's starting point and it never gives encouragement for progress made. Indeed, it always minimizes progress by saying, "You haven't come far enough, fast enough."

This is a simple diagram that demonstrates the point:

$$\text{Achievement} \\ * \text{Self-Esteem} = \frac{\text{Achievement}}{\text{Expectation}} =$$

Achievement in some form is absolutely necessary for self-esteem. However, it is always in relationship to expectation. If expectation is somehow greater than whatever the achievement might happen to be, self-esteem will not be enhanced; no matter how great the outside world might legitimately consider the achievement. That is, if the score of the formula above comes out to be less than one, self-esteem will actually be diminished. In this regard, expectation is not a helpful motivator, but a thief. And this thief always discourages, never encourages. Of, you could say, it "encourages" by being negative and critical. Some encouragement.

This formula operates in love relationships. Expectation and comparison do not take into account where one is starting from, only where one should be, regardless of the circumstances. This is why it is so crucial for us to know our own inherited spot on the spectrum and our combined spot with our loved ones. If you are five foot, eight, you just won't be able to be the center in a world of seven-footers, but with a lot of work, determination and help, you might be a hell of a forward, at least in high school. Accomplishment has to be in a context. Direction and intent have to be seen against a backdrop, otherwise there is no perspective.

What we are saying here is that self-esteem and a sense of confidence are as important to a relationship as they are to an individual. Like individuals, both of these vital resources can be harmed or destroyed by a lack of appreciation for where we have started in life. We often quote saying about people who were born rich with all of the advantages of position and station, "He was born on third base and thought he hit a triple."

The strongest underpinning to self-esteem is an appreciation of the direction of one's life, not its measurable data. We often ask people, "Are you seeking to live an admirable life?" This is another of those tricky phrases that could lead people to compare their lives unfavorably to others. Our late friend, Dr. Virginia Price would frequently ask people, "Are you living your life from your highest sense of good?" She wasn't asking people to feel badly about themselves. She

was inviting them to move in the best direction possible, because that movement would enhance their feelings for themselves. The same is true for couples.

Here are some further thoughts on the importance of direction in our lives.

## OBSERVATIONS ABOUT DIRECTION

It is not enough to feel oneself just a little better, a little different from one's parental models, as it adds complacency and takes away the challenge to continue moving.

There is no reason to fear making healing relationship your goal, unless you are afraid it will become a new expectation that will cause you to feel like a failure.

The true self-esteem of a couple comes from their committed effort to move in the direction of a healing relationship, not "reaching" it.

## DIRECTION IN RELATIONSHIP TO SELF

Direction provides spiritual happiness much more dependably than material acquisition.

The relationship I have with myself will be reflected in the relationship I have with my loved ones.

When I am committed to moving in a healing direction, I extend an invitation to my loved ones to do the same.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MAKING HEALING YOUR GOAL

It might be good to reflect for a moment on how radical the title of this book might seem: *To Heal or Not to Heal*. That title contains a belief, perhaps unstated: that relationships can be healing and that love-based relationships reach their highest evolution by being healing. This is not a given. Marriages in particular have often existed in cultures where healing was not a part of the expectation or purpose of the bond.

### PRINCIPLES OF LOVE RELATIONSHIPS: HEALING, LIMP-ALONG, AND DESTRUCTIVE

1. All three of these relationships can be stable over time\*.
2. No one commits to a love a relationship with the expectation or hope it will become destructive in the future.
3. All love relationships change over time, either positively through informed evolution or negatively from the unchallenged forces of fate and personal habit.

*\*Healing relationships are stable around empathy, warmth and conflict and recovery; Limp-along relationships are stable around loyalty to a status quo, unrequited blame or fatalism (there's nothing to be done); and Destructive relationships are stable around bitterness, abuse, victimization, tragedy, shame and grim determination.*

### CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALING RELATIONSHIPS

1. There is an eagerness to promote the feelings of warmth and of safety through acceptance, forgiveness, love, resolved conflict and reassurance.
2. The natural and unnatural crises and conflicts of life facilitate a continual process of rebirth.
3. A language develops over time that is unique to the relationship in which is embedded the codes for humor, affection, request, conflict, idiosyncrasy, and self-correction.



#### CHARACTERISTICS OF LIMP-ALONG RELATIONSHIPS

1. These relationships often appear static, “never changing,” because unconsciously they seek stability over evolution.
2. All limp-along relationships either degrade over time due to habit and life forces or grow due to a willingness to allow in new information, modeling and guidance.
3. These relationships often need a crisis that is powerful enough to wrest them out of their comfort zone and to allow for outside intervention.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

1. Fear (on someone’s part) is a predominant and integral part of these relationships as there is an impending sense of threat and frequent crisis moments.
2. These relationships allow for the abdication of personal responsibility, either through blame or projection.
3. Uncorrected over time these relationships will often involve some form of premature tissue damage, either self-inflicted (smoking, drinking, drugs, overwork) or from the behavior of another person.

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## PART TWO

### THE THREE WORLDS OF LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

#### CHAPTER SIX

##### THE SURVIVAL, EMOTIONAL AND PRACTICAL WORLDS

**W**e use the word, “World” because it means an entity that does not overlap with another. Just as countries have boundaries and are separate from other countries, one world is not expected to be like another world. When we do go to Mars in the future, mankind will be on a very different world and that world will demand adaptations in order to thrive and survive. No one will ever imagine they can go outside on Mars without a helmet and a space suit. What is normal on earth will not be normal on Mars, as we know from having already gone to the moon.

Just as the concepts of Healing, Limp-along and Destructive were descriptive of different styles of love relationships, so the concept of the three worlds has merit only in love-based relationships of choice. There are lots of relationships in life that are neutral in the emotional world. There is no expectation that our baker or our launderer will have even a remote understanding of our inner world, much less be satisfying to it. If those individuals meet our expectations in the practical world, we have no need of any deeper involvement. But love relationships of choice always involve the emotional world. It is frequently the world in which a lot of people have had the least training.

Here is how we present these three worlds in a hierarchy. This is very important. All three worlds are important, obviously, but there is an order.

**SURVIVAL WORLD**

**EMOTIONAL WORLD**

**PRACTICAL WORLD**

## THE SURVIVAL WORLD

By the “survival world,” we are describing those literal moments in life when the situation suddenly becomes a matter of life and death. This is when a young child falls in the swimming pool, granddad chokes on the Thanksgiving Turkey, someone falls unexpectedly or dad feels the sudden onset of breathlessness, pressure and radiating pain down his left arm. If these situations are recognized for their inherent seriousness all normal pursuits cease and all the attention goes to the emergency at hand.

This is as it should be. Suddenly, it doesn’t matter if the turkey gets cold or any other non-consequential concerns. What matters is the safety of the person who is afflicted. There is no delay, no debate. There is action and that action is directed at saving a life or mitigating physical impairment. As rapidly as possible expert help is summoned, or the person is carried to it. Winston Churchill famously said, “Nothing focuses the attention like being shot at.” That is the experience of the survival world.

Here are three axioms regarding the survival world.

**THIS IS A LIFE OR DEATH WORLD.**

**IT IS SATISFIED WHEN THERE IS AN OUTCOME, EITHER GOOD OR BAD.**

**DENIAL IN THIS WORLD CAN BE DEADLY.**

In regard to axiom number two, “It is satisfied when there is an outcome, either good or bad,” it calls to mind an old medical dictum, “All patients stop bleeding one way or another.” This rather grim aphorism is a reminder that urgency, insistence and instant action are normal to the survival world. This is a world that rewards being strenuous, adamant and insistent. However, when the survival world is not actually there, but “feels” like it is present because of aroused feelings, then that adamant energy is not called for and can be harmful to the process at hand.

## THE EMOTIONAL WORLD

This is the world where healing is possible. Someone unknown to us once said, “The purpose of marriage (or close friendship) is so we can finish our childhoods.” This aphorism means that these particular relationships can allow us the opportunity to . . . They are based on love and commitment and therefore they have the capacity for understanding, empathy, tenderness and forgiveness. Those are vital components of healing.

The fact that these relationships so often end in disillusion, disappointment or divorce is the reason for this book. The feeling of love is very real and very powerful. But a feeling cannot teach us to leave old habits or programming behind. The simple truth is that most of us were not well trained in the emotional world, no blame intended toward anyone.

The beginning of that training is twofold. One is to understand that in the hierarchy of the three worlds, the emotional world is in the second position right after the survival world. The second is that this world can be satisfied, but only if we understand what to do and not to do when it is present. For many of us, our intuitive actions when this world appears are not helpful to it. Our intuitive actions often come from two sources: the modeling from the people who raised us and actions that are effective in the other two worlds.

Here are three axioms regarding the emotional world.

**NO ONE DIES IN THIS WORLD.**

**LACKING EMPATHY AND FORGIVENESS THIS WORLD CANNOT OPERATE IN A FULLY FUNCTIONAL MANNER.**

**VULNERABILITY\* IN THIS WORLD IS GOOD AS IT CAN ELICIT TENDERNESS.**

\*This is certainly not true in the other worlds. Vulnerability in the survival world means an excruciating experience is taking place. In the practical world vulnerability often places one at a disadvantage.

## THE PRACTICAL WORLD

### THE VITAL ROLE OF RECOGNITION

*JOHN*

*"YOU LOOK VERY DISAPPOINTED."*

Among my lesser afflictions, I tend to be mildly or deeply OCD about my breakfast. When home, I eat exactly the same thing every day of the week. And I will continue with one breakfast for years, followed by the same devotion once a new menu appears. Thirty-some years ago my particular predilection was a certain brand of bread toasted and topped with peanut butter and sliced bananas. Now the brand of bread was produced by an obscure whole grains bakery in Santa Cruz and had limited availability in the Palo Alto area.

Penny was assiduous in tracking down its sources and providing it for my morning repast. Because it had no additives, we stored it in the refrigerator to elongate its preservation. Opening the fridge one morning I was distressed to find my bread missing. Turning to Penny and using my most plaintive voice, I said, "I don't have any bread." Normally this would have aroused in my wife a litany of excuses (she had two small children) that I would have found rather satisfying. She would have been taking responsibility for by feelings and admitting guilt. What ruler doesn't enjoy such obeisance?

She looked at me and said in a very conciliatory voice, "You sound very disappointed," instead of going into a litany of how sorry she was. I was left for a moment like a fish on the shore gasping for breath, lips moving but nothing coming out. I then realized she was exactly right. I was disappointed. Having affirmed my feelings, she went on with her own preparations. Having had my feelings affirmed, I found myself able to make an alternative breakfast. I survived.

It was a small event, but it represented a change in direction for our relationship.

JOHN

*"THESE ARE JUST WORDS, SO DON'T WALK OUT OF THE ROOM!"*

Having my own fantasies of what a flourishing relationship looked like, I imagined a life without conflicts or fighting, only "love." After all, we truly did/do love each other. Therefore it was very disconcerting for me when Penny would become upset with me. I remember a feeling akin to panic rising up in me and my first thought was to escape. And I often did just that, walking out of the room at the first sign of her being upset with me. My rationalization for this was that things were about to get out of hand and I was protecting the marriage by not allowing things to escalate to the place of permanent damage. Needless to say, this was very frustrating for Penny since she never brought weapons to these conversations.

They tended to take place in the kitchen. We were in the midst of one such contretemps when Penny could see I was about to flee. In a moment of inspiration, she said what should have been obvious, "Do not walk out of the room. These are just words and they will not hurt you." I remember my internal response was, "Oh, she is right." And I stayed.

This was many years before I had any clear sense that the emotional world was not the survival world, much less the knowledge that the most important tool in the emotional world is to be, "Comfortable with being uncomfortable." Today I know this and I stay in the room at least fifty percent of the time, maybe more.

JOHN

*“AM I A TYPE A?”*

In the very late 1980's I embarked on one of my most exciting journeys in life. I met the renowned cardiologist of Type A Behavior fame, Dr. Meyer Friedman and was recruited by him to become a group leader. He was conducting a vast research program on the prevention of heart attacks using the strategy of teaching people to reduce their Type A Behavior. He had previously proven that reducing Type A Behavior created protection from having a subsequent heart attack in people who had already suffered at least one.

Not surprisingly this new commitment involved a great deal of training to learn this new skill. It is not possible to treat someone else's Type A Behavior without addressing one's own. So, I attended many classes and participated in scores of groups, as well as voluminous reading of the literature. In my own personal group work, I was cautioned not to assess my partner, children or close friends, as this was a key Type A habit. I was not to comment on their behavior at all.

I had been studying with the Friedman Institute for more than a year when Penny, while standing in the kitchen, said to me, “You must be about to burst. So, let's get this over with. Am I a Type A or not?” I had always “shared” in the past whatever I was learning, especially if I thought it would be helpful to her “improvement.” Looking at her, I said, “I have no idea. I have been working so hard to change my own Type A behavior that I have had had time to think about whether you are or aren't.”

Penny displayed a brief look of disbelief as in, “I know you better than that.” Then as she continued to look at me, she realized that there was no second “shoe” to fall. She realized I had not been waiting for the moment to disgorge all of my new-found information and how it related to her and her behavior.

It was a very small moment, but I saw something shift in her gaze as she contemplated the possibility that I just might be shifting my energies in life to correcting my own behavior rather than hers. I believe a new level of safety was introduced into our relationship that night that she believed I had begun to try at least to protect her from my “innocent observations.”

*JOHN*

*"HAVE I CHANGED?"*

I had been engaged with the Meyer Friedman Institute in San Francisco at Mt. Zion Hospital for about two years when it occurred to me to ask Penny if she was seeing anything different about me. After all, I had been working hard to not only learn all the course material, but also to alter my own Type A behavior. It was a rigorous program and I had been faithfully participating.

One evening, in the kitchen, I screwed up my courage and asked Penny, "Have you seen any changes in me in the last two years?" imaginary beads of sweat popping out on my forehead. Without the slightest hesitation, she said, "Yes, absolutely." Whew, relief. I then ventured to ask, "In what ways?" Again, without even a blink, she said, "Two ways." I paused for a moment reflecting on how long this had been clear to her.

Again, holding my breath, I asked, "Can you be more specific?" She said, "I can talk to you now." I knew what she meant. By that point we had been married close to twenty years and were chatterboxes. She meant that she could bring up sensitive or critical subjects with me and she was not afraid of my response. She could say things to me where I would not immediately become defensive.

Okay, that went pretty well. I took another breath. "And the second way?" She said, "When you do get into your old behavior, all I have to do is say a word or make an indication and you quit that behavior immediately. That is wonderful."

Pretty good.



*JOHN*

*"LOVE LETTERS.*

I am sorry to share that my father was not a very happy man, at least during the time I knew him. He died early at the age of fifty-seven when I was only eighteen years old. He smoked heavily, at least two packs of Lucky Strikes a day. When he died unexpectedly it always seemed a little strange to me that the American Tobacco Company didn't send a letter of condolence to the family of one of their greatest benefactors.

My mother and father had a standard issue limp-along marriage. He was dutiful in his successful work for the state government and she was dutiful in providing almost everything else. They were both remarkably good people by anyone's measure. Away from our home my father was genial and even humorous. He was well liked but had no close friends. He was quiet even withdrawn and today I know that he was clinically depressed.

Not too long after his death my mother and I were up at the family home where she had grown up. She pulled a shoebox out of the attic that was full of the love letters my father had written to her when they were courting in the 1930's during the great depression.

I purloined a couple of the letters and read them surreptitiously, then returned them to the box. I did not know the person writing those letters. The gulf between the person I knew and the man in those letters could not have been greater. He was hopeful, poetic, longing, excited about the future and very verbally loving. He evinced an eagerness to be married so they could live the rest of their lives together. He was clearly longing for and planning on a flourishing relationship. And, why not? He possessed a demonstrable love and vision. Of course, his vision was in his fantasies because his own parents, though very faithful to their marriage, had had a very cool marriage. His set point had not been in flourishing, only his dreams.

*JOHN*

*"THE BENEFITS OF DIRECTION."*

First research and the # of MI's after the program

*JOHN*

*"BUT FATHER, SHE IS THE LOVE OF MY LIFE."*

One of our closest friends in life is a faithful and dedicated Roman Catholic Priest. Through the years of our friendship we have heard many colorful and touching stories of his fifty-plus years of ministry.

Two of my favorite stories are both very similar, having to do with one spouse taking care of their demented spouse. In both cases, it was husbands who were attending to their wives who were suffering from final stage Alzheimer's disease. In both cases the wives no longer recognized their husband. And in both cases these men came faithfully every day to the care facility, rarely ever missing a meal or an evening.

In both cases he asked both men out of respect and curiosity why they were so observant. To one he said, "She doesn't know who you are." To which this husband responded, "But, Father, I know who she is!"

To the other man who never missed a meal, he made the same inquiry, wondering if it ever tired him or discouraged him. The husband seemed a little startled at the question, responding, "But, Father, she is the love of my life."

Circumstances do not create flourishing marriages. Love does.

*JOHN*

*"MY 'FIVE RULES' OF MARRIAGE"*

I often tell people that I have "Five Rules of Marriage:"

Talk, Talk, Talk.

Ask, Ask, Ask.

Listen, Listen, Listen.

Apologize from your heart at every possible opportunity.

Come to know yourself well enough so you can protect your partner from yourself.

Obviously, this is not a very comprehensive list and bears some explaining, but it emphasizes some of the things I have found to be most useful when there is consternation in the emotional world.

It is shorthand. Talking means revealing your vulnerable self in trust. Asking is multipronged. It has to do with asking for what you need and asking what the other person needs. Listening means to do so without being defensive, but curious as to the other person's experience while remembering that what the other person is saying is "Not Personal." That is a tall order. Number five requires knowing ourselves our most importantly our "blind spots," so we will not inflict our own injuries on our partners. This is the stuff of real love. And the really hard work.

JOHN

*"CONGRATULATIONS! YOUR HOSTILITY SCORE IS ZERO."*

In the Type A research program, it was the goal to investigate if reducing the amount of Type A Behavior, a person demonstrated would act as a protection from having a heart attack in the future. Obviously, if that was the goal then there had to be a method by which the prevalence of Type A Behavior could be measured in a person's life. And there was.

It was a half hour videotaped interview conducted by highly trained interviewers. The purpose of the videotape was for review if there was any question about the score. Much of the score came from facial signs and other subtle behavior signs. It was very accurate with a very high test-retest correlation. Following this interview, it was possible to put a score with two groupings of behavior: free floating hostility and time urgency. These are the two components of Type A Behavior. By adding the two scores together you then have someone's Type A "Score."

The goal of the behavior modification is to help people demonstrate less and less Type A Behavior. In this way people experience much less needless stress and arousal. Because the study group was very large with 1,500 people in treatment and 1,500 people as controls, this interview was only done in three-year intervals along with a full medical evaluation.

Just after one of these three-year intervals Dr. Friedman was serving as a guest leader of one of the groups. There just happened to be an individual in that group whose hostility score had gone from quite high in his initial interview to zero in the subsequent interview. Dr. Friedman pointed this out to the group praising this gentleman for his hard work.

Then he asked him, "Has anyone in the past three years spontaneously mentioned to you that they have seen a change in your behavior?" The man thought about the question and then said, "I don't recall anyone commenting on my change in behavior. But I will share with you something that I recently became aware of. I have noticed more and more recently how nice my wife has become, but I don't think she has changed!"

When this anecdote was shared with the faculty, I enjoyed it as much as everyone, but I also felt slightly chagrined. At that time, I had been with the program for two or three years and I had been making the exact same observations about Penny as this man had about his wife.

When we begin to see our loved ones through the lens of admiration, rather than hostility, we see them much more accurately.

*JOHN*

*"WHY ARE YOU HITTING ME?"*

Many years ago, Penny and I did a year-long training experience in family therapy with the noted therapists, Ruth McClendon, George McClendon and Les Kadis. We met with twenty other therapists once a month for a full weekend of training at a beautiful place called Pajaro Dunes, where the McClendons lived.

It was expert training in a beautiful place with lots of other eager and talented people. In the evenings we also had a lot of fun. Their methodology was unique and very effective. Our group divided itself into four or five "families." Once there had been husbands and wives chosen to be the anchor mothers and fathers, no concept of same-sex couples then, Ruth acted as the "stork."

She took orders from each couple asking how many children and what sex they might prefer. Then in a hilarious process she would take each of the other participants and bring them one by one to their new family. It was hilarious because the stork disregarded all the requests, except for one couple who got exactly what they wanted, as if that actually made a difference. I will never forget the arrival of "twins" into one of those families who already had too many "children."

Once these "families" had formed they organized themselves around a problem that would make them suitable for family therapy. The rest of the year was spent with different ones of us working as the family therapist with one of these "families," under the tutelage of one of the instructors. It was remarkable for how real it all became.

My family consisted of me, my wife and our three children. I have no recollection of the problem we created or of any details. What I do remember vividly is being in "therapy" one day, someone acting as the therapist and Ruth watching in the background. At one point my "wife" began hitting me pretty vigorously on my right shoulder.

She was really mad! In hopes for some surcease from this grave injustice (I was not being hurt) I looked past the therapist to appeal to Ruth with my eyes. What I saw was her looking in our general direction nodding her head, as in, "I can understand why she is so mad she is hitting him." In the moment I was stunned, if completely unhurt.

Later, I understood. Without any awareness I had assumed my own father's passivity in the face of emotional upset. Even though it was all role-play, it evoked set point reactions. Emotions are emotions. I had apparently driven my pretend "wife" around the corner and she was not like my mother, who adapted to everything. Set points are real and powerful.

*JOHN*

*"YOU HAVE NEVER SPOKEN TO ME THIS WAY BEFORE."*

Happily, I have had the opportunity to teach in Rome at the Salesian University since 1976. I have taught courses on psychotherapy there through lecture and live demonstration. In the course of time many lifelong friendships have come from this experience.

In one of my annual journeys there I was met by one of my closest friends in the lobby of the small hotel I stay in near the university. She had been separated from her husband for many years and had begun dating.

By this time, she had become an outstanding and much sought-after psychotherapist. She also taught at the university. As we were excitedly catching up on each other's news she became serious and asked if she could share something very personal as she had a question for me. Giving my assent she proceeded to tell me of being physically assaulted by her current boyfriend in the middle of the night waking her from her sleep. He left marks.

My demeanor changed dramatically and I began to give her vital information about men who verbally, sexually and physically abuse women. These are monsters who do not admit to being so. She recounted that he blamed her for these episodes. She asked me if I thought couples' counseling could be beneficial.

I shared with her in no uncertain terms that couples' therapy would be of no benefit. It would only serve as a platform for him to blame her and seek to curry favor with the therapist. He would make a very persuasive case for everything being her fault while shouldering none of the responsibility. She pointed out that he (the abuser) was also a therapist. Didn't that count for something.

I said to her, "In order for him to change he would have to commit to personal therapy with an expert on abusive men and would need to see that person twice a week for a minimum of four years!" Since that was not likely to happen, she needed to remove herself from this person's life, because anyone who will hit you could very well do worse to you.

Reflecting on the change in my manner and the intensity of my talking, compared to our easy banter just moments before, she said, "You have never spoken to me this way before." I said, "Your life has never been in danger before. You are my friend and I want you to be safe."

Even for the highly trained and very intelligent, it is easy to slip into denial when the survival world makes its appearance. She headed my warnings and separated from him.

*JOHN*

*“WHY DO YOU COOK THE ROAST THAT WAY?”*

I cut my teeth as a therapist in the 60's and 70's on Transactional Analysis (TA). Even today, I am a Certified Teaching Member of the International Transactional Analysis Association. For those too young to remember TA was created by an observant genius named Eric Berne who soared unexpectedly to some small level of fame when his clinical text book for therapists, *Games People Play*, became a run-away best seller.

He saw certain patterns in peoples' lives and called them, “Scripts.” According to his theory these scripts were difficult to change mostly because people were unaware of them. He made his job to help people decode their scripts so they could become conscious and changeable.

Like all good teachers, he was a storehouse of stories. He frequently told one that illustrated the power of ingrained behavior that had lost its usefulness. It involved a husband asking his wife one evening as she cooked why she always cut off about three inches of the butt end of a roast and placed this small piece of meat beside the larger piece. She professed not to know. Her mother had always done it.

Feeling curious, they called mom who also didn't know why she did it. Her mother always had. Grandmother was still living, so enjoying the hunt they called her. Her response, “Because my baking pan was too short and that is the only way I could fit a roast into it.”

This is such a great story. It helps us to understand that there just might be behaviors in our love relationships that no longer hold value.



*JOHN*

*"DO YOU WANT TO HEAR YOURSELF ON TAPE?"*

Having grown up in the 1940' and 50's I embarked on an All-American experience in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I took over my brother's paper route. He was going off to college. The world was very different. Every Thursday night I would go to each home or apartment (about fifty) on my route and collect thirty-five cents from each of my patrons, later rising to fifty cents before I retired at the end of my junior year in high school.

It was a different time in that no one thought anything of a twelve-year-old kid going from house to house and often being invited in. I was a fairly friendly elf of a kid and there were a lot of lonely elderly people on my route. Besides, I knew all of them.

Being the truly struggling student that I was, my mother would admonish me to be expeditious in my collecting so I could get back in a timely way to do my homework. I greatly preferred talking to studying so her request fell on pretty deaf ears.

A young couple had moved into the house next door to our apartment building. The wife was a nurse and she worked for the doctor who had purchased the home and turned the downstairs into his offices. The upstairs was let to the nurse and her husband.

One evening the nurse invited me upstairs so I could pet the dog, a big attraction, and chat. We talked for a while when the husband announced that they had just recently bought a reel to reel tape recorder and they had been taping our conversation. Would I like to hear myself on the tape recorder? I was thrilled, having never seen a real tape recorder before and with excitement, I assented.

They played a couple of minutes. Oh, my goodness. What I heard on that tape was a young country hick. I had no idea my accent was so thick, even though both my parents had grown up in one of the most rural counties in the state. I was a bit abashed. I also made a decision right there and then. I would remedy my accent. I would not sound that way all my life.

Now I still sounded the same way the next morning after that event, but a process had been put into motion. If you heard me today, you would tell me I still have an accent. I would agree and I can still fall back into the lingo of a rural West Virginian in a heartbeat if I am talking to the right folks, rather proud of it I must say.

The issue was awareness and choice. We can't change anything without awareness and until someone teaches us choice. I imitated a lot of people over the next decade and more if I admired their manner of speech. The tape gave me awareness I did not have and the models gave me choice. Change did not, could not come immediately.

This is the way of our set points. We become aware of them, feel the pull of them and let others teach us how to move. And, we don't expect to do it overnight.

*JOHN*

*"ARE YOU MAKING A SINCERE EFFORT?"*

JOHN

*"THEY DON'T LIKE PARENTS VERY MUCH."*

In 1975 I graduated with my Ph.D. in psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology. As with all Ph.D.'s I had to complete a dissertation and mine was nothing if not ambitious. At the time I was studying with Bob and Mary Goulding at the Western Institute for Group and Family Therapy in Watsonville, CA. They were innovative and charismatic, determined to find a briefer model of therapy than the psychoanalytic style that had dominated for decades.

To this end they created what they called "Marathons" which were mere three-day intensive psychotherapy workshops that began typically on a Friday morning and ended at Sunday noon. They were able to host these workshops at their institute as they had room and board for thirty-five people at a time.

As I said, they were very charismatic and these intensive workshops were compelling to watch and to participate in as people appeared to make life-changing decisions. Curious to their true effect, I focused my research on one such weekend. Describing the entire process and the results are a paper all in its own.

I did do one very interesting thing that was not actually called for in the research protocol. Because the workshop had been audio recorded, I decided, with Penny's cooperation, to transcribe the entire workshop and include it in the body of the dissertation. Penny's consent was vital as she typed the entire dissertation including the 300 plus pages of transcript using an IBM Electric II typewriter, the top of the technical line at the time. It was slow and painstaking work. This transcript, annotated, turned out to be quite a valuable contribution and hundreds of my dissertations were sold as a result of it.

At one point I gave a copy of my dissertation to my brilliant mother. She read the entire 430 pages. She had grown up as a proofreader even as a small child for the family weekly newspaper. In the process of her review of the manuscript she found a dozen spelling errors that had been missed by our own professional proofreader. I asked her what she had thought of the content.

Now psychotherapy was foreign to her so she was not in a position to evaluate the quality of the work. What she did say was pithy and to the point, "They don't like parents very much." By that she meant that there was an undercurrent in many of the pieces of work of prejudice toward parents, as if they had intentionally said or done harmful things to their children on purpose. This

turned out to be a signal insight and is the reason why we began Chapter Two with the sentence, "We like parents."

JOHN

*"TO BE THE BELOVED FATHER AND THE BELOVED HUSBAND."*

My late colleague, Dr. Virginia Price was one of my mentors at the Meyer Friedman Institute. She was a walking encyclopedia of Type A information and experience. For a time in her life she had conducted an abbreviated course in Type A modification at the Army War College in Carlyle, PA. It was modified because what would have normally been a two-year course with group meetings every other week was shortened to nine once-a-month meetings over an academic year. The course was very popular and was always oversubscribed.

The average rank for someone chosen to attend the Army War College is that of colonel or above. At that time the population of the college was entirely or mostly male. These were all men of outstanding intelligence, ability and motivation.

From her years of working with these groups of mostly colonels, near gods on the bases they commanded, she made the following observation, "The greatest problem them have is in making the transition from colonel to being only the 'beloved husband and the beloved father' once they left the base and walked through the doorways of their homes.

That is, she recognized that it was very difficult for these men to "switch," just as it is for lots of people to switch from their practical world roles into the emotional world.

This was especially true for these colonels. It can be argued that they not only worked in the practical in their positions, but also in the survival world, much like emergency room physicians and police officers. They were trained, "You are always on duty." Virginia told the story of one colonel who went to the base store to shop on his day off.

A visiting general was in the store and upset about how well it was being run. In a loud voice the general demanded to know who was in charge of the base. The colonel responded that he was but it was his day off. The general blasted him saying, "You are never off!"

But the general was wrong. When that colonel went through the door of his home, he was and needed to be only, "The beloved husband and the beloved father." We need to be able to switch, no matter how pressing our day job.

*JOHN*

*"I NEED TO TALK TO YOU."*

One morning as I was about to leave our home, Penny was making preparations to leave also. She turned to me just before walking out the front door and asked, "Do you have any time in your schedule? I need to talk to you." Feeling my pulse quicken ever so slightly, I replied, "Yes, I have my ten o'clock hour free. "Good," she said, "I'll call you."

I'm not sure of the quality of my therapy from nine to ten, but I have to believe I was not on my game one hundred percent. Ten o'clock came and I sat by the phone patiently, if mixed with a little dread. Crap, what had I done now? After all, the most dreaded four words in marriage are, "We need to talk." Ten after ten came and then ten fifteen. I could handle the pressure no longer. I hitched up my seven-pound cockapoo, Tiramisu, and walked the block and a half to Penny's office.

Upon entering her waiting room, I could see through into her office, Penny concentrating hard at her computer. Looking up, she looked startled for a second and said, "Oh, my gosh, I forgot all about calling you. Thank you for coming. I need to talk to you about a couple of cases."

Cases! Cases! That's great. I love to talk about cases, or anything else in the practical world that is not focused on me, or us or any form of upset in the emotional world.

I said, "Great, what do you have?"

That little dog mentioned above spent the best part of her sixteen years as my co-therapist, sitting in peoples' laps or sleeping beside them as they worked.

*JOHN*

*"THE THREE CAUSES OF ANGER IN THE HOME."*

*JOHN*

*"DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT."*

*JOHN*

*"MAYBE SHE'S JUST MEAN"*

*JOHN*

*"THAT IS WHERE MY DAD USED TO STRAP ME ON THE BACK OF MY LEGS."*

*JOHN*

*"GLOBNERS' AND OTHER CODES FOR COUPLES"*

*JOHN*

*"OH, THEY GOT DIVORCED. HE WAS AN ALCOHOLIC."*

*JOHN*

*"THE IMPORTANT THING IS FOR YOU NOT TO FEEL BAD."*

*JOHN*

*"JOHN, I THINK YOU ARE FORGETTING YOU HAVE A TYPE B PLACE INSIDE YOU NOW."*

Penny

Penny