

**Sanctuary in Personal Relationships:
A Man's Point of View**

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“ . . . In your hand I feel Spring burn in the bud.”

Mary Mackey, **The Kama Sutra of Kindness: Position No. 2**

To find refuge in human relationships is one of the most beautiful and profound experiences of sanctuary. We may think of sanctuary for ourselves as one of seeking a special time, place, and activity or experience that regenerates our spirit. In this pursuit of a little retreat from the world we may desire solitude, solace, quiet, stillness, and simply being one with Nature, God, or ourselves. But integrating the need for daily sanctuary into our friendships and intimate relationships is not only therapeutic but also deepening, for our individual need for sanctuary can be balanced by understanding and accepting a collective need for refuge.

A relationship that has the individual and collective needs for sanctuary built into it creates a strong anchor and safe harbor in life, for we realize how empty we would be without some human connection. Shared sanctuary time and space may also allow us to safely process certain issues — a friend or loved one may comfort us in a time of need or give us valuable support or guidance. Furthermore, as in the case of couples, sharing sanctuary together may be healing or give the relationship an opportunity to bond at deeper levels of intimacy. Lastly, and again partner or family relationships is a good example, sanctuary may be an excellent opportunity to understand the needs of *each* individual — that it is okay and necessary that each person acknowledges their need for sanctuary and explores it independent of the overall relationship. We call this *mutual respect for sanctuary*.

Our interest in the subject of sanctuary in relationships is not based on our professional side as counselors or wellness practitioners. Rather, it is our over twenty years of personal experience as a couple, and those deep abiding friendships outside our marriage gathered along the way, that has given us insight to the value of sanctuary built

into intimacy. Because most people are searching for a deep connection with a significant other — a life partner or dear friend — we have chosen to talk about these types of relationships. Such abiding human connections often give us loving and compassionate refuge from a world that may seem little concerned about our personal welfare.

If sanctuary is created in a relationship, then any of the four needs associated with the pursuit of sanctuary (world weariness, woundedness, solitude, and communion/celebration) become an accepted part of daily life. One will feel supported in their individual need for sanctuary, and the relationship itself will be supported by the collective need. You only need to reflect on those times you have come home and wished someone said, “Why don’t you take the next hour to yourself, I’ve got you covered while you relax and unwind.” Most often, it is the woman who offers this gift to her male partner, but if men truly knew the points they could score in the heart department, they would also generously offer the gift of sanctuary to their spouse.

Any relationship that embraces sanctuary also enhances the opportunity for enchantment. Enchantment embraces the soul’s desire for interconnectedness. M.C. Richards, in her book *The Crossing Point*, states it eloquently: “One of the truths of our time is this hunger deep in people all over the planet for coming into relationship with each other. People are hungering and thirsting after experience that feels true to them on the inside, after so much hard work mapping the outer spaces of the physical world. They are gaining courage to ask for what they need: living interconnections, a sense of individual worth, shared opportunities.” So, in intimate relationships that embrace the need for individual and collective sanctuary enchantment shows itself in romance, spontaneity, childlikeness, playfulness, lightheartedness, laughter, and awe and wonder. If couples don’t make room in their lives for regular sanctuary together, they may also suffer in all matters of enchantment.

Sanctuary allows us not only to celebrate relationships but also to invest in them. For example, Tricia and I accept in our marriage the value and need to experience sanctuary in celebration and communion with special friends. We consider such a need to be unconditional and uncompromisable, knowing full well that our lives and our own relationship are enhanced by immeasurable degrees. Tricia takes periodic sojourns, for example, to see her dear friend, Morgan, in Arizona. Not only do these pilgrimages

revitalize their friendship, but they also have a profound effect on regenerating Tricia's own soulfulness. She is able to explore spontaneity, laughter, and intimate friendship far differently than with me, yet when she returns I benefit immediately from her renewed vitality. I have had a musical partnership with a cellist, Jeff, for almost twenty years. During most of that time we have communed regularly one day a week for up to six hours or more. Our personalities and views about life are different enough to provide interesting philosophical discussions, yet our music comes from one Great Spirit. More than anything, however, our unconditional fellowship has supported each one of us through major life crises and marriage difficulties.

A 45-year old friend, Brad, had recently got married for the first time. He came out to Cortesia a couple weeks before the event for an evening of music playing and celebration. Three of us men and Tricia shared some dessert and heartfelt discussion with Brad. The question was asked: What principles could Brad uphold for creating sanctuary in his relationship with his partner, Mitchico? Each of us shared one principle that we felt worked for us. Upon reflection the next day, Tricia and I felt that the following four principles (also see box out) were quite gemlike, and most certainly spoke for our own relationship, as well as those we have fostered with dear friends:

1. Nurture the Needs of the Soul
2. Honor the Otherness
3. Strive to Resolve or Reduce Conflict & Tension
4. Create Rituals That Bond

We want to talk about these principles in this chapter. But we also want to add a twist: to individually offer a man's view of sanctuary in relationships and a woman's. Tricia, for example, has fostered a deep wisdom, which I dearly respect, for a woman's need for sanctuary in a relationship. Over many years this personal need has clarified itself, often not without resistance on my part, until I myself, as both a partner and man, now understand more what it is women want and need, not only for themselves but also *from* men. I value Tricia's role as a teacher for me in these matters. I also value her many female friends who have helped support her in her search for sanctuary in our marriage.

If we are to live in harmony with other beings, we must try to respect them and to understand them, even if we think that we do not agree with them. This is perhaps the most difficult task in deeply personal relationships, and one upon which to build and maintain common ground. By sharing our individual points of view about sanctuary in a relationship, we are attempting to give you insight into a respectful relationship you may desire.

FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR CREATING SANCTUARY IN A RELATIONSHIP

Nurture the Needs of the Soul

Guidelines

- Acknowledge that every person needs time and space to regenerate themselves
- Be aware of, develop, and maintain your personal sense of spirituality
- Engage in those activities and experiences that give you peace
- Give of yourself in ways that support the sacredness and well-being of others
- Support the development of the collective soul (Third Body) of the relationship

Honor the Otherness

Guidelines

- Focus on the other person's positive qualities
- Acknowledge that each individual is a work in progress
- See the larger picture of the relationship beyond your personal expectations
- Let go of your own rigidity and be more accepting
- Don't expect someone else to think and feel as you do
- Strive to see God and goodness within the other person and to honor their sacredness
- Give the gift of sanctuary to one who is in need

Strive to Resolve or Reduce Conflict & Tension

Guidelines

- Be current with your own feelings and don't push strong feelings under the rug, allowing them to fester
- Strive for communication that is respectful of each other, with peace as the goal
- Create a safe/neutral space in which to deal with issues and feelings
- Reward efforts toward resolution with some positive experience that eases the tension
- Agree to check-in with each other about any residual feelings
- Find solace and comfort elsewhere (close friends, Nature, pets, spiritual advisor, counselor, etc.) when resolution cannot yet be reached

Create Rituals That Bond

Guidelines

- Acknowledge that every personal relationship requires regular periods of special time and space together
- Seek and nurture the deepest levels of common ground
- Pursue interests that elevate your sense of shared harmony
- Be willing to explore new experiences and let go of shared activities that no longer serve the relationship
- Create a diversity of short and longer bonding rituals to fit the time available
- Be flexible with scheduling special time together
- See any bonding activities/experiences as gifts to the relationship, not obligations

A Man's View of Sanctuary in Relationships

Men: Where is Your Great Love?

My view toward sanctuary began as a child growing up in a troubled household. My father was an alcoholic and was quick to go into rage. Therefore, my mother, two sisters and I treaded very lightly in fear. My mother found asylum early on in deeply religious beliefs. I found asylum in Nature in our backyard. But my most accessible refuge was my

bedroom. This was where I felt fully safe from my father, if not the world. I furnished it sparingly, my favorite possession being a small radio near my pillow on the headboard. Every night before falling asleep I would twist the dial repeatedly, tuning into all varieties of music, radio dramas, talk shows, and news. It was the doorway into a vast realm of imagination. But it also gave me great relief from my immediate troubled life.

When I came home from school I would lay on my bed and watch the late afternoon shadows of rustling plants sway across the curtains and walls. All of my attention was given to these images and to the subtle sounds of neighborhood and home life. In this bedroom haven I felt incredible peace. It was when I heard my dad's truck enter the driveway that my pulse increased in anticipation of an evening of tension.

The conflict in our household increased as we children became teenagers. Around twelve years of age, I began playing guitar. It was as if a very familiar and mystical instrument was offered to my soul. And of course, all of my deepest wounds, passions, love, and emotions were allowed to find expression, exploration, even resolution through the music of this instrument.

These great loves — Nature, my room, and music/guitar — intertwined to become my unique sanctuary in life. Their importance has traveled faithfully with me through many relationships and friendships. They have nurtured my soul, given me important life rituals, helped me to understand and process emotions, and given me insight into how to honor others.

I want to suggest that the energy of sanctuary has a primarily feminine energy. It is ying based, soft, and compassionate. Like any safe and comforting matrix, it holds creative potential, drawing power into itself in preparation for release back into the world. The heightened activities of the world, on the other hand, emit a strong male or yang energy.

From an early age, boys are metaphorically given a psychic shield, like any good warrior. This form of armor serves not only to protect but also to bolster confidence and courage. Nonetheless, the shield becomes a form of cultural display for manhood and the perpetuation of the “male mystique” — an image of manliness held up by the media, peers, pop heroes, and the like. Most men know for a fact, and indeed are wounded by this knowledge, that they fall far short of realizing the ideal of manhood. Most men I

have known, when all armor is laid down, admit to feeling fear, loneliness, alienation, shame, and guilt. In fact, they admit to having emotions that are tender, yet know they cannot afford to show them freely and regularly. Sadly, to deal with these inward confessions, men feel compelled to extend their shield as a wall separating them from others, especially women or competing males. They eventually find hiding behind their woundedness, when all they truthfully desire may be occasional refuge from the world.

I saw all this in my father's psycho-dramatic relationship to his world of work, family, and alcohol. But he allowed himself precious little opportunity to turn away from the world and lose himself in some great love on a regular basis. If he could have found regular sanctuary away from work and substance abuse — some great love within his family, with a dear friend (which he had none), in passionate service helping others, or simply a fascinating hobby or interest — he could have tapped into and befriended the female aspect of divinity inside his heart. He could have experienced sanctuary amidst the world.

A friend of mine, Roger, is an excellent example of a man who balances a strong work ethic with love for family. Even though he is divorced, he and his ex-partner are close friends, and for years have shared parental responsibilities for their three children. But Roger also has a deep love for water. This is what makes his soul quiver: canoeing on a mountain lake, sitting by a river fishing, or simply watching water. Roger's balanced life projects an image not only of "manliness" but also caring and sensitivity.

It is my belief that men can nurture their soul the most by discovering a deep love that, like Roger, makes their soul quiver at just the thought. Such a love shoots straight to the heart and becomes a form of convalescence from the male-dominant energy of the world. But more so, a strong passion opens up an area of receptivity within the soul that understands how the gift of nurturing sanctuary can be wonderful for others, including a lifelong partner or close friend. This form of "honoring the otherness," as we call it, recognizes the compassion every man must foster to honor the sacred needs of the soul.

I remember when Tricia first began expressing her need for taking sojourns here and there. At first I thought they were a response to the frequent "no's" she received from me when she often asked if I wanted to do something or go somewhere or plan a trip. Typically male, I reacted to money issues, work worries, and time responsibilities much

too often. But Tricia's specific need for regeneration is best met by wandering, as it were, amidst the world from time to time. One day I realized that my great passion for music was my form of wandering through the world's many cultures, and frequently led me to travel for performances. So why should I deny Tricia her form of refuge within the world? I saw clearly that our relationship could deepen if her expressed needs were honored and allowed to blossom as well.

Men: Find a deep soulful love that doesn't harm a soul and allows you to stay within your heart. Use such an interest to find refuge from the heavy male energy of the world.

Men: Are you Comfortable with Individual and Shared Space?

Perhaps the first unspoken compromise in an intimate relationship is the giving up of individual space to shared space.

Quite frankly, I think most men don't give much thought to the idea of shared or individual space. But we should. We often think of spaces — the kitchen, bathroom, garage, living room, bedroom, etc. — in terms of function, not in terms of holding key psychological energy. Men outfit a house as if they were simply putting on a flannel shirt over bare skin. Women furnish a home as a deeper expression of cloaking the inner skin of the soul. Left to me, our quaint Cortesian home would be more Spartan. But everyone who visits is totally charmed by all the touches the two shared women in my life — Tricia and Sonji — have given it.

At the heart of any relationship, therefore, is how individuals are going to nurture the needs of their soul in shared space. And men need to know their role in this process. When we conduct sanctuary workshops, there are those women present (without their partner) who are struggling with this very issue in their life. They often talk about the reluctance of their male partner to discuss the needs for sacred space and time. My sense is that many men are generally afraid to be alone with themselves in what I would call deep qualitative activities — experiences that get us out of our head, out of our control and conquer issues, and into our heart and spirit. We seem to need distraction, or perhaps images to help us in our continued struggle to live up to some “male mystique” perpetuated in the media. But to just be alone in our room? You got to be kidding! And

for our partner to suddenly start talking about creating sanctuary in her or his life? Come on now, it sounds like you've been watching too much Oprah Winfrey!

Tricia was the first person I ever met who insisted on having her own space. When she moved into my house for the one year before we married, she naturally assumed that the upstairs attic room was her domain. Being new lovers, I was initially offended. But this was nothing compared to her added request to be able to sleep alone when she desired, and for me to honor her need for general alone time in her space. I was totally caught off guard.

I remember the many years my mother and father slept together in the same bed, even when Mom should have been entirely justified not to because of the pain she felt over my father's abusiveness in our family, home, and in public. Mother was a model of devotion, and would not abandon my father. So I, like most men I am sure, naturally assumed that an intimate relationship included the ritual obligation of shared bedroom space. When Tricia changed that false assumption, it touched that very issue of abandonment within me.

Within days of living together, Tricia naturally requested to sleep alone in her room, and asked me to honor her need for privacy by not entering without permission. I heard the poet, Robert Bly, once comment that in matters of privacy for the soul in a world of demands, the doorknob always seems to be on the other side. That is the way it has been for me — my personal living spaces as an adult seem to be *too* accessible. But for Tricia, the handle and lock is always on her side. Nevertheless, Tricia's steadfast claim for personal space and time regularly pushed my abandonment button, and perhaps more wounding to any man, also dictated the accessibility of sex.

It seems unnatural, as I reflect on this whole issue, that I would be shocked at Tricia or any woman's need for a safe alone space. After all, I grew up fully appreciative of my own bedroom sanctuary as a youth. Moreover, our first home together also afforded me the opportunity to create my own space in an adjoining studio.

But the issue here that men must understand is not so much the physical aspect of creating one's own place. Men are territorial by nature, and are quick to defend physical space. What men need to understand is the *psychic need for space in a world of constant*

contact. We must learn to defend and uphold the need for this type of “unseen” space in a relationship. And this taps into the great therapeutic value of sanctuary.

Men seem to need to control the psychic space of others, especially women. I’ve yet to meet a man who didn’t feel a sense of abandonment when his partner began exercising her own need and right for space. It is almost as if we have a psychical umbilical cord connected to the maternal realm that, if truncated, leads us into a tailspin of little boy insecurity. The truth is, men’s abandonment issues are control issues. Take away our control over a woman’s use of her time and space — her choices about what is in *her* best interests at the time — and we are left without power. A man who cannot understand a woman’s periodic need for sanctuary — from him, the world, her family duties, work, whatever — has much to learn about women *and* himself.

Men, for example, seem to be naturally self-distancing from the world. A woman pulls a weed, touches the soil and pats down the new empty space or prepares it for a lovely plant. A man is likely to spray the foe with chemicals donning military names, and moves on to the next kill. This type of behavior shows insensitivity and indifference. And this is what kills hope for sanctuary in a personal relationship: when one person (usually the woman) realizes that the opposite of space is not fullness but oppression.

Enter the arena of sex . . . but only briefly.

Women’s desire for intimacy is not about consummating their affection and devotion through sex. In fact, for most women intercourse is generally disappointing and unfulfilling. One reason for this is that their primary need for simply feeling a tender haven in a lover’s arms is often not offered. I owe much to Tricia for patiently showing me early in our marriage the great refuge gained by simply holding. If a man can use his arms not to posture with his shield but to embrace and hold another, he will have perhaps offered the greatest gift of sanctuary possible: a space to feel safe and loved.

My experience is that a woman needs space naturally as a response to her need to feel control over her own life. She needs space as well as tender holding during her monthly cycles. Simply put, a woman needs to know she can invest in her own *sovereignty* and have the support of others in doing so.

But a man must acknowledge the value of sovereign space in his life — time and place to regenerate his own spirit. Most often, men will find regeneration in “third

places” in the community, like a bar or perhaps a nearby lake to fish, or in their home, like in front of the television, or simply in a male friendship.

Yet, a personal sense of place at home is about as deep a feeling of sanctuary most men may need to understand its value. I remember my grandfather, for example, engaging in hours of evening sanctuary in his basement with his model railroad. In fact, it has only been recently that I have rediscovered my own “bed-womb” type of space.

As you might recall, our home at Cortesia is quite small, with barely over 900 square feet. Many years ago, we built a 360-foot, round wooden structure (called a yurt) about sixty feet from the house. Immediately it was identified as Tricia’s sanctuary space where she meditates, prays, writes, holds small gatherings, and often sleeps. The spiritual energy (temenos) there is deep and well contained.

A few years later we built a second yurt of the same size near the house, overlooking the gardens. Soon it became known as “Forrest’s yurt,” but it really served as an office, warehouse, exercise room, and my writing and music studio. Unfortunately, the space was always crowded and the energy unsettled — far from being my own space. Well, eight years had to pass before I finally realized that I was without a much-needed personal space (remember, the only enclosed space in the house is Sonji’s bedroom; our “bedroom” is an open loft). I announced that I was rearranging the yurt. My tasks included deep cleaning of clutter, moving boxes out and plants in, creating clearly defined spaces for writing, business, listening to music, gazing into the gardens, exercising, and meditating. And it has worked! Although the spaces are intimate, the overall feeling is one of spaciousness.

Old habits die hard, for the lovely porch just outside my yurt seemed to attract unnecessary clutter. But one day Tricia and I removed everything, swept it well, and placed an area rug, portable futon mattress, couple of planters, and small altar. It is a perfect outdoor sleeping loft and “hanging-out” spot overlooking the woodland garden near the house. The lighting, water sounds, birds, and breeze are wonderful!

Neither of these spaces could have happened if I did not have the support of Tricia and family. And that’s the point. Tricia’s unconditional support helped us create a new ritual of sleeping together on this lovely porch and having quality hangout time. She and

Sonji also knew that I needed a creative space (my yurt) that truly inspired and comforted me deep into the night.

Men: Recognize and honor the physical and psychical needs for time and space in a relationship. This is one of the greatest gifts of sanctuary you can give to yourself and others.

Men: Are You Willing to Work for Peace?

Most attendees at our workshops are women. The few men are there because they have been willing to hear a different drum in their lives. The women always express how much they wished their partner could be there to hear our words of encouragement. Tricia and I share honestly how recent the revelation of shared and individual sanctuary has come into our lives. We talk about the struggles in accepting such needs. We share the successes.

Some of the workshop participants are couples right on the edge. Some are looking for new insight to help with unresolved issues. Others have moved through issues, earned new wings of sorts, and are willing to jump into and explore groundbreaking terrain. When they hear the possibilities of sanctuary as a way to honor the needs of each other, they light up.

Let's take the area of conflict and tension. As a youth, my home felt like a public boxing ring for family conflict — no other space but my bedroom felt sacred. I learned the deep value of a safe haven at such times. Relationships need to honor the need for such safe havens.

For example, when Tricia and I began living together, we immediately created a garden next to the driveway on the side of the house. It was a publicly viewable garden. Right from the get go, the garden assumed its rightful role in our relationship: as a place to express pent-up feelings, to seek solace, and to let go of control. The garden became our therapist. Sometimes our conflicts spilled out from the house into the garden in plain public view. I would march my oppressive, bullheaded views right out the side door to wager a tangle with Tricia amidst the roses. Other times Tricia would clearly be “lost” in the garden, totally oblivious to time or duties. She would stay out until dark, blissfully content. I would be inside perpetuating a slow boil, an inner rage. She seemed to be

defying me, to be saying our relationship wasn't important enough to warrant coming in for a shared meal or discussion. I took it all too personally, because I could not understand or accept how valuable the garden was in her need for sanctuary *within* our relationship.

Relationships can flourish like gardens. Left un stewarded, they will perish. One couple decided to create a sanctuary space in their yard. They placed a comfortable bench among a floral setting with a nearby water feature. They did it together. They invested in the enchantment of their relationship, the time spent there working for them like compounded interest. But there is more. They agreed that when sitting on *that* bench in *that* spot they would honor an unwritten code of conduct: no arguing, put downs, judgments, unsolicited opinions, vulgarity, and the like. Here they could bring their love and respect for each other. They could bring honor to a daily ritual. Do they ever talk about touchy issues or subjects? Of course! But the context, the setting, *their intent*, is what holds the sacred energy of their relationship. And guess what? The same issues that could spark unpredictable reactions at other times in ordinary or too familiar places lose all their potency in their sanctuary space.

Another couple wrote to us about how they created a sacred space in an unused attic. They each brought to it personal items to create an altar. They also co-created its furnishings and mood. They call their space "Inner Moon." They explained that in lieu of separate personal spaces or bedrooms, they wanted to create a safe place for the individual and collective soul in their relationship.

Again, women are apt to take the initiative in their desire for sanctuary time and space, and to use such opportunities to ease tension. Men are often embarrassed at such notions, yet we are so willing to find refuge for hours glued in front of television sports. We are quick to gloss over the heart stuff even as we may or may not be aware that we are desperately hurting inside ourselves. The closer men stay in contact with the world through the media, sports, alcohol, drugs, sex, competition, exploitation, and violence, the further we distance ourselves from our soul, the soul of a significant other, and the collective soul of the relationship.

Many men suffer from "the grass is greener" or "better deal" syndrome. We hold out, don't surrender deeply to a relationship as women do. Because we are so preoccupied

with the world as warriors, as suggested above, we are stunted in our ability to address tension and conflict at home in peaceful ways. Sanctuary in a relationship cannot exist while one eye is on the world front and the other is on the “green grass of home.”

I submit that when I turned my back on the media, professional sports, and the like, I began a process of investing in the emotional stability of Tricia’s and my relationship. I realized that the world constantly gave me the wrong messages in which to effectively communicate: rudeness, put-downs, disrespect, stereotyping, and dishonoring. Heartfelt communication listens more than speaks, hears more than what is being said, and is able to trust rather than fear.

You have in your hands the investment of two human beings who have tested the waters of relationship in just about every way possible. At one time, several years ago, I was scheduled to write this book myself. But Tricia and I were also exploring and mapping new territories of intimacy that demanded a collaborative effort in what we had to share with the public. I tell you this because it would feel incredibly hypocritical to sound so peaceful and loving and yet not have strategies to positively deal with anger, conflict, and tension. This book has more strategies throughout than you can shake a stick at!

I have often used the analogy of fire walking to describe our relationship. That is how intensely hot our relationship could be characterized over most of its history. But our devotion has been to walk across the coals of intimacy together, *not in fear but in trust*. You see, Tricia and I never really fell in love with each other initially, although we fully plunged into the fire of intimacy. But we did fall in love with God on a spiritual level, and a life-guiding philosophy of reverence for life on the practical plane. Our daily meditation practice, and daily practicing the presence of Nature and loving kindness, each has helped to insulate us from the fire and heat of intimacy.

In recent years, the fire walking analogy doesn’t seem to hold much power. On the other side now we have found deeper sanctuary in the vision of the Beloved. And this is a wonderfully new form of falling in love. Now, the analogy of walking on water seems more appropriate. It’s not about sinking or swimming together, but more about surrendering to the will of our collective spirits — a Third Body that cloaks us in the sanctuary of intimacy, and hovers over our daily efforts to be of service on this Earth.

To write a book with another person is often difficult. But Tricia and I honor the space we need separate from each other to write deep into the night or on personal retreat. We each need to discover a personal voice that rings true and authentic. However, the overall voice of our Third Body must also ring forth, and that is what we aspire to share in our writings as well. Tricia's love and devotion to me, to her family, to God, and especially to herself is the great reason she is my sanctuary. The devotion I have learned from her has allowed me to have the deepest intimacy possible with life overall.

Men: Be willing to disarm yourself, all those latent emotions that kill and oppress a relationship, a mood, and a sweet intention. Co-create safe and peaceful opportunities and places that bond your relationship. Create rituals of purposeful activities that allow tension to naturally flow into resolution. Create even deeper rituals of interests and experiences that sustain peace, harmony, and love.

Men: Do You Know What Lies within Your Heart?

I receive much inspiration from one of my spiritual mentors, Gandhi. Gandhi once received a letter urging world leaders to draw up a charter of human rights. He wrote back: "In my experience, it is far more important to have a charter of human duties." He came to this truth in his early years of marriage when his wife, Kasturbai, stood up to his ill-conceived idea that it was his right as a husband to impose his opinions on his wife. After years of stormy relationship, Gandhi realized that it was his responsibility to live for others rather than for himself. Repeatedly, he had to ignore his cherished likes and dislikes to see things from Kasturbai's point of view rather than his own. Gradually, Gandhi began to see that there was no friction between them except what he had imposed. He also saw that Kasturbai had always been trying to win him over by love.

Men should see it is as part of their duty to co-create and co-steward a feeling of safety and emotional comfort in a relationship. A man recently confided in me that in the death throes of his marriage, he found himself sleeping on a couch in another room as if he were a guest in his own home. I asked him if he had a problem with that. He gave a large sigh of relief, laid down his psychological "shield," and confessed that it actually felt very good to simply be alone. Then he shared that he perhaps could have been more

open to creating safe emotional solace in his marriage. This would be akin to winning over by love — love that honors the other at every turn, and honors the larger Being created by the relationship.

Tricia and I have worked extremely hard to foster and honor what we call the Third Body in our relationship — that *Beloved Being* born out of intimacy. We have done what most relationships often fail to do: to create or uphold a common philosophy that aligns with our spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical selves. I want to convey to you what I mean by this.

Men often have a philosophy toward life that is blunt, forceful, insensitive, judgmental, and self-centered. It is a view that attacks the world head on. For a man to embrace sanctuary for himself or another asks him to approach the world with more compassion. He needs to listen with a different bent, lay down his shield, and open a small window in his heart for the voice of the world, or his partner, to be heard. More than anything, however, he needs to listen to himself.

In Sanskrit there is a soft word that speaks to this type of listening to oneself. The word is *shraddha* and simply means, “that which is placed in the heart.”

Shraddha is what we deem worth having, doing, attaining, and being. It reflects all that we have made ourselves, and because it embraces our beliefs, values, prejudices, and preconceptions about life, it points to what we will become. Shraddha is not only for individuals. Intimate relationships and friendships have a collective shraddha, as do communities and countries (for example, the Roman Empire lived by the philosophy, “If you want peace, prepare for war”).

Shraddha, in short, is our faith.

This may sound all encompassing, and you are right. But what is more encompassing than your life, *and then your life shared with another?* I find it most useful to think of shraddha as one’s deep driving desire, the heart’s yearning. In this sense shraddha depicts one’s faith, not in an absolute religious sense, but in the sense of a soul and spirit that is moved to fulfill itself *knowingly*, not blindly, and *willingly*, not with coercion.

My closest friend, Jeff, even as I have been writing this essay, has just experienced the sudden and dramatic dissolution of his five-year marriage. The shock to all of us is its suddenness. But as Tricia and I listened for hours, at different times, to Jeff and then to

Julia, we came to understand that their individual shraddhas could not be supported by a collective shraddha. Strong individual beliefs and directions that were irreconcilable betrayed true desires of the heart. Is this wrong? Of course not. But in shared lives it is true that there is a larger crucible that holds the relationship's sacredness. It is almost like a holy grail in which its location in the heart is found by asking the common question, "How can I serve thee?"

Jeff and Julia could not invest further into a collective shraddha because of key differences in beliefs over family. She wanted to start a family. He didn't. For Julia, family is central to her heart, it is how she can be served in part by her partner, and it is how she can make her home a sanctuary in which to serve with her love. Family is also where Julia can make the deepest commitment to the realm of the Beloved, embracing her partner and children in a larger sacred crucible, *knowingly and willingly*.

Tricia and I began our family at the same time we discovered Cortesia as the collective philosophy that runs our soul. As I have said earlier in this book, Cortesia means a deep, noble sense of courtesy, respect, and reverence. For myself, I find it absolutely fascinating that the issue of respect is central to my Life Work. My father was enraged for most of his life because he believed no one respected him. Yet he failed to realize that respect is an unconditional gift *you give*. Well, he unknowingly gave me this bit of shraddha, and I placed it well inside my heart. Cortesian philosophy has given my shraddha poetry, softened its voice, and has anchored it as part of my sacredness.

Men: Conduct your life from a deep conviction that upholds the sacredness of life. Give women and children reverence as a sacred gift. When a man begins to see life through the eyes of courtesy, honor, respect, reciprocity, and reverence, and when he chooses to address these qualities in a friendship or intimate relationship, he is on the threshold of creating true sanctuary for the Beloved. He will know the importance of nurturing the soul and honoring the Otherness. He will desire to create opportunities, rituals and experiences that bond rather than fracture. And he will strive for peace and honor in those instances of conflict and tension.