

## **Relationship As a Spiritual Path**

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### **Introduction**

I wanted to spend a couple of minutes and tell you how much Phoenicia has meant to me over the years. I first came to Phoenicia just fifteen years ago for the first intensive in my Core Training. I went to my first sweat lodge ever, and I really thought I'd gone to heaven because the feelings afterward were incredible, and my daughter, Jennifer, was conceived that night. I think that was probably when I started to take Core Energetics seriously. Before that, I was just attending. I had joined the program in a fit of absent mindedness because I had been trained in both psychoanalysis and orgone therapy and did not feel entirely at home in either camp. I didn't feel at home in psychoanalytic circles because I believed in and practiced Reich's work, which was totally denied any credibility there. I was not at home in Orgonomic circles because, as a non-medical doctor, I had been secretly trained by a medical orgonomist. None of the people whom I interviewed and worked with on my doctoral dissertation on Reich's child rearing theories could know I was doing clinical work.

I viewed Core Energetics initially as simply a place where I could be professionally all of who I am. Come to think of it, I guess one could say I wanted a spiritual professional home, but I would not have phrased it that way then. The spiritual aspect was somewhere else; I hadn't ever thought about it.

My experience with my core training group was the most profound, intense experience with a group that I've ever had or will ever hope to have. I could never have conceived of the intimacy that developed in our group. It led to tremendous growth for me and eventually to my life's work, practicing and teaching it.

I have many memories of Phoenicia: not only with my core group but also with my daughter, Jenny, and her father at all seasons of the year. We would come up when Phoenicia was blanketed by snow to enjoy sledding, and Jenny and I would come up a lot during the summer, especially two summers when there was a wonderful Pathwork children's program.

For about five years, from Jenny's third year until her eighth year, I went through tremendous upheavals in my life, a true "dark night of the soul." It was the most difficult period I've ever been through in my life. Some of you were aware of it because I was teaching you then, or at least trying to with whatever parts of me I could salvage from the struggle. During that time I have so many memories of being in the Sanctuary here, often alone, looking at the mountain view and remembering the Biblical phrase, "I lift my eyes up unto the hills from whence cometh my help." I don't remember any help appearing, but at least there was comfort.

About six years ago, I began to come out of my dark night. Phoenicia looms large in my memory as the place where I began to heal. That summer, I rented what had been Andre Leites' house way up above the upper road, at the top of the hill. I just remember sitting inside and outside of that house listening to Mahler's 1st symphony and Shostakovich's 2nd and watching Jenny disappear down the long driveway on the road to the dining hall with some confidence that she was both safe and free here, and that I could start to heal.

As I healed, I found myself in a relationship exponentially deeper on every level than I had ever experienced before. It took me to heights and, of course, to depths of myself that I had never known. An anxiety that I had carried all of my life, so chronic I simultaneously it just "happened" that I was asked to teach more and more about love and sexuality. So I began reading in much more depth had been unaware of it, began to disappear. Simultaneously it just "happened" that I was asked to teach more and more about love and sexuality. So I began reading in much more depth... and thinking... and feeling. As usual, my own life, my clients' lives and my teaching all taught me deeply and interacted with each other. So many of you from whom I have learned so much in the last few years are sitting here, and it's your questions, your comments, and your participation that I'm giving back to you this morning.

### **The Journey**

I have always seen the process of psychotherapy and, more important, the process of life, as a journey of the hero, of the soul. I see all of our struggles as heroic, my own as well as my clients. Those are the ones I know most intimately. Psychotherapy did not start in the twentieth century. All of the great works of art and of literature carry the themes of our daily lives if we have the courage to look at them that way. And, it does take courage to look at ourselves and at our lives in larger terms.

For a long time, the journey of Ulysses/Odysseus seemed to me the prototypical hero's journey. But, in the last few years, the myth of Eros and Psyche, written a few centuries later, has seemed to even better illustrate the growth of the conscious life, and it could also serve as a kind of paradigm for the development of love relationships.

So I would like to take a few minutes, and in a very abbreviated form, take you through either a memory or a present experience of that journey for yourselves. I would ask everyone to close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Breathe deeply. Feel wherever you have tension and see if you can just let it go. And remember the time when the life you lived was unconscious, before you began to do the inner work that I know you all do now. Feel your arrogance. Feel your self satisfaction. And feel how your life went at that time. But also remember your deeper longing.

In the myth, Psyche is a princess so beautiful that no one even wishes to marry her. She is worshiped from afar. She is worshiped so much that she excites the jealousy of the goddess Aphrodite. Her situation becomes so extreme that an oracle advises her father to leave her alone on a mountain top to await a marriage with death. Feel the first time that you felt the presence of death, your fear of your own mortality, and your fear of your life. Then, just in time, feel yourself whisked away by an unknown rescuer to a paradise-like environment. Feel your relief that you don't have to deal with all those things you know are underneath. Maybe you don't have to go on the journey other people have gone on. You can just live life as it is.

This is also the first stage in most relationships, what we call the honeymoon stage. So feel what a relief it is. Remember when you fell in love, and how the very love itself seemed to solve any problems that existed in your life. Allow yourself to bask and just relax. Feel the joy and the music and how it reflects the joy felt at that time. But even with

this joy, your soul becomes restless for expansion, and ultimately you must question.

Psyche's questions were earned by her sisters. Acting on their counsel, she held up the light to the love that visited her every night under cover of darkness, and in so doing, she turned her world upside down.

When questioned, love flees, and Psyche is catapulted out of paradise as she tries to cling to love. Feel inside of you a time when you dared to question, and you shook your whole world. Feel how you had to do it, the terror and the consequences, and know in your soul that this is when your real quest, your real journey toward love began. Know that Eros alone is the awakener, and that only you can do the tasks that are required for your individual development.

Psyche confronts the questions we must ask ourselves and our clients: What is our life task? What is our life plan? What are we here on earth for? What inner and outer marriage do we seek? As Psyche confronts the tasks set for her by Aphrodite to regain Eros, we see how love can be the torturer and the purifier of the soul, leading to growth, individuation, and the marriage of our masculine and feminine aspects. As John said yesterday in his lecture ("Coming Home" in this issue), we must submit the crystals (ourselves) to the crucible (of love) to allow it to be transformed. Love is that crystal, and we are the crucibles of our transformation.

### **Discussion**

In ages past, seekers of the deeper mysteries of life left their homes and close relationships in favor of the seclusion of a monastery or a solitary journey, facing their dragons with only their faith for companionship. Odysseus and Psyche both labored alone to complete the tasks ordained for them by the Gods. For many people today, however, the wilderness that brings us face to face with our gods and demons is in our intimate relationships. And Phoenicia, as a Pathwork Center, a center for the life force, was built on this premise. The Guide says that it is in relationship that our souls are hewn. On our personal spiritual path, we confront our lower selves, our shadows. In our relationships, we, like Psyche, can illuminate the interaction between our own and our partner's dark sides. This is the crucible.

As marriage becomes less a joining of property and families, and more a conscious joining of individual souls, we can learn to use the difficulties in our relationships as opportunities to awaken and bring

forth our finest human qualities. Perhaps only in our century have people sought to unite in themselves and in their relationships the three forces of love, sexuality and eros. In this context, only our hearts and our bodies can select our mates. For, without the deep bonds of love expressed through our bodies, it is difficult if not impossible to enjoy rather than merely accept or tolerate the mirror our relationships can become for us. We need this very deep, strong connection.

Intimate sex is utterly terrifying and mysterious, but it is also a spiritual path. If we crave the ecstasy, we must be prepared to undergo the agony of it. What is that agony? Exposure, helplessness and inevitable, eventual loss. Every relationship is going to end. If from nothing else, eventually by the death of one or both of the partners. We don't like to think of it, but this is built in from the very beginning, and is a part of the terror we face. But, if we are willing to deeply know and be deeply known by our partner, it is possible to have a sexual relationship far beyond the limits of what most people or sex therapists would ever hope to experience.

In order to deeply know and be known, we must be willing to become mature, differentiated human beings capable of expressing who we really are even when our partner does *not* respond with affirmation, empathy or approval. Because our relationships mean so much to us, we collude with each other rather than risk severely disrupting or losing them. Most therapists also collude with this collusion. So helping people confront this will not make them "like" us as therapists. It's not nicey nice. An example of such collusion would be a spoken or unspoken agreement that if I reveal something about me, then you must reveal something about you. Or, if I reveal something of which I am ashamed or guilty, you have to approve of me (or it). But it may not be okay, and you may not like it, and you may be hurt and you may be angry. If we can't expect the truth, that's collusion. So what's important is that we need to learn to hold and to soothe ourselves even when our partners don't approve of us or like us.

One of the deepest, most primordial fears we bring to relationship is our fear of what is inside of ourselves. We say "I can't trust you." We really mean "I can't trust myself." As we draw closer to another, many of these inner fears can be articulated. Many people are afraid of losing their power, their very selves, in relationship. For them, it is a challenge to balance listening to their inner voice and listening to their partner. Others are afraid of being abandoned by their partner and have to learn how not to abandon themselves. Those who fear

commitment often have difficulty maintaining their boundaries and must learn to say “no,” especially if they are chronic rescuers or caretakers. As therapists, many of us fall right into that.

I would also say that the kind of sexuality I'm talking about is real intimacy during sex. Such sexual intimacy does not come naturally. We must learn to make love with our eyes metaphorically and truly open, not focused inward as sex therapists teach. As Karyne said, there is a belief in the culture that characteristics of aging make us less attractive as sexual partners (“Mid-life Sexuality” in this volume). We have to get through that nonsense. We have to really look at the person to whom we're making love. I see lots of bodies as I work. No bodies are “perfect,” whatever that means, whatever the cultural stereotypes are at any age, and young people are even more crazed about it than older people, I sometimes think. Most couples have “normal,” satisfying sex while avoiding real intimacy and therefore real soul growth, and I think this is what leads to a lot of mid-life problems. Intimate sex grows by exposing wishes and attempting behaviors that are unacceptable, forbidden or frightening while they still produce those feelings. We must master our anxiety, not allay it, and have the guts to be our whole selves in our sexual relationships.

The process may not be possible until we reach some maturity through work on ourselves and perhaps just plain aging: we must, somehow, have reached the ability' to soothe and validate ourselves. If we are still “trusting” our partners rather than ourselves, we do not have the courage or the capacity to face our lower selves: our sadism, our hatred, our wishes to control and punish, our shameful sexual desires and fantasies, and our terrors of rejection and ultimate aloneness. We must master rather than mask our anxiety. If we want to be whole sexual beings, we must give up our inner infant's hope for unconditional love.

It takes tremendous courage, integrity and faith to *risk* intimacy. Odysseus and Psyche were engaged in endeavors leading them toward their beloveds, but it is significant that on that journey each traveled alone, often in despair. I would suggest that we of the 20th century travel this path both together and alone. Although I feel the journey is richer and ultimately more challenging when shared with a beloved as inspiration and irritant along the way, there is a sense in which the *work* of the quest is essentially a lone task.

By joining our soul to that of another, whether as partner, lover, child or parent, we have an opportunity to accelerate the growth of our soul by deepening our capacity for love, for compassion, and the natural

cycle of giving and receiving that is characteristic of any relationship. Our masculine and our feminine aspects can achieve a balance. An intimate relationship can be a catalyst on our soul's journey of awakening by holding up a mirror in which we see not only our own face but that of our lover and that of our God: the ultimate differentiated union of opposites.

It is important for us to remember that our souls and bodies have been drawn to each other to complete each of our life tasks, and that each of us possesses the attributes that will irritate and inspire the other to become his or her highest self. If we allow our true selves to come forth, our relationships will become fertile environments for the nourishment of each of us.

When you choose to relate to another, you are choosing to be affected. We often have the wishful fantasy that the other should change, not ourselves. But, our soul will be ground and polished through the actions and character of our beloved, through the praise, criticism, frustration, excitement, actions and inactions of that person. To know that relationship has a high spiritual purpose is to be willing to bear the challenges that lie along its path. But it is also to rejoice and be glad, to be exuberant and playful, to bask in the companionship of the person who delights you, to participate in the joys of incarnation by being happy animals, creatures of passion and habit and comfort.

As our relationships and our shared lives and work become increasingly intertwined, we must strive more ardently and use ever deeper resources of courage to be true to ourselves. But, at the same time, we must use those same resources to reveal ever deeper parts of ourselves to the other, for only by so doing will our relationships continue to grow, deepen and enrich themselves.

As I suggested above, deep intimacy in the crucible of a committed relationship does not come naturally: it is a learned ability and an acquired taste. As we develop, grow and, yes as we age, we will become more differentiated as individuals and better able to validate ourselves. We will be able, in the crucible of a committed relationship, to look at our human capacities for hatred, sadism, and control, and also at our secret needs and insecurities, our sexual fantasies and our terrors of rejection and of being ultimately alone. By facing these aspects of ourselves and each other, by giving up the remaining vestiges of the child's hope for unconditional love, we will truly find each other. The paradox is that acute awareness of our ultimate loneliness and separateness will lead us to greater intimacy than we could ever have

dreamed of. Rather than fusion, real intimacy consists in deeply knowing oneself in the presence of the other while recognizing the other's immutable separateness. Only in complete surrender to our core self and its immutable singularity will we find ultimate union with each other.

It takes tremendous courage, integrity and faith to risk such a journey. But, at its apogee, you will find self-transcendence, true spirituality, and fun.

