

unravel your relationship knots

by élia morgan and molly roemer

bringing your relationship into new light



Most of us spend an inordinate amount of time thinking and talking about our relationships. For women, they tend to become the centerfold of conversations and for men an internal source of frustration. At times,

we may feel enlightened, answers may appear to us instantly, we may say all the right things and have all the right moves. Other times, our ego agonizes over every detail of a situation. Our awareness shuts down, our compassion wanes and our hearts fill with dissolution. Cultivating a lasting and harmonic relationship requires a simple state of awareness and yet that state of awareness can be so hard to maintain.

Yoga teachers, relationship experts and authors of *The Guru Papers*, Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad believe that long-lasting relationships are possible and do still exist. These erudite, philosophical muses have been life-partners for over thirty years, they're still hot for each other, they still make each other laugh and they still crave each other's presence.

Joel and Diana espouse the belief that we're "a coupling species and our tendency is towards bonding." In order to cultivate the kind of relationships that our inherent desires lead us to, we must be willing to take an honest look our relationship ideals and become aware of how those ideals constrain us.

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Joel and Diana believe the male/female attraction is one of the forces that can propel the evolution of humanity forward and they're working to help the rest of us obtain a little bit of what they have. Their own process for developing trust and understanding led them to examine the conditionings underlying the behavior of men and women and the result is the knowledge and the proof that we can be truth seekers, we can be curious, we can be passionate and we can be in and have love.

confronting our limitations

Joel encourages people to look at freedom as "a dimension of action rather than as an escape from something, as a living process instead of a goal."¹ He believes the true spiritual quest involves considering

what it is that binds us rather than questioning how we can become free. Couples have a tendency to idealize that bubble of bliss they experience in opening act of their relationship. As soon as the first disagreement transpires and the spell of falling in love starts to

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fade, they long for the effortless they enjoyed in the beginning. "Wanting a relationship to always feel good means avoiding conflict and discomfort," and this Diana says, "also creates an imbalance as times goes on." When challenges start to reveal themselves to us, we may have the impulse to give up, throw our hands in the air and find the next best thing. There is a marked chasm between the initial spark of chemistry and learning how to truly love a person.

Diana explains that just as in Hatha Yoga, "you must confront your physical limits in order to transcend them." Since we typically avoid broaching prickly topics when the mood is pleasant, most of our "working out" happens in the throes of an argument when we are already sweating and our heart is pounding. Joel and Diana advocate making quarrels more like a tennis match—may the best man (or woman) win. They believe that disagreeing does not have to be malevolent; instead, strive to be truth seekers. Perceiving ourselves as part of the big picture, rather than the center of it, opens the possibility for more of an objective view.

Overtime our love can either evolve or stagnate—it is really up to our perception. Alstad eloquently wrote, "Each person has his or her own movement in life; sometimes the two flow together and other times conflict arises. There is no way to be harmonic all of the time and thinking you should be limits growth and stifles individuality." Let us grow to be more curious about our mate, studying them and becoming experts on them.

"approaching relationships as a yoga involves being attentive to the other person's limits as well as your own, which opens them to change."

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The process of getting to know our significant other awakens facets of “self” that would otherwise remain dormant. In Exploring Relationships: Interpersonal Yoga, Diana states, “one cannot get to know oneself fully in isolation, for relationships uniquely ignite and reveal many aspects of the self.”² Whether we are practicing yoga or spending time with our mate, we might as well be looking at a mirror reflection of ourselves. Through our interactions with others, we learn more about our own personalities, proclivities and idiosyncrasies than we would probably ever want to.

Diana suggests viewing this feedback as a gift rather than an attack. If we can be willing to make the act of giving and receiving feedback easier on both people, the exploration of self becomes an exciting discovery rather than an uncomfortable trip. The impact our romantic relationships have on us can be quite powerful. Diana compares the alchemy of a human bond to a water molecule and states, “no one touches us as deeply as those we are bonded with.” The intermingling of two hearts, two spirits and the entanglement of two bodies forever changes who we are.

The closest we can physically be to another human being happens through the act of sexual intercourse. This exchange of energy and fluids elicit bonding hormones and leave behind lasting emotional imprints. “Considering the tremendous explosive power there is in the interrelationship between atoms,” Diana explains, “it’s not surprising that intimate, personal relationships can produce such intensities as love, anger and jealousy.” Being aware of the affect we have on those with whom we are intimate is integral to the success of the partnership.

the fidelity knot

Making the active decision to commit to your partner is akin to engaging in a regular yoga practice; it is an invitation to transform. Just like the “act of practicing” yoga will awaken facets of your mind and body that might have otherwise remained dormant, so too can the act of practicing a relationship leave the same kind of imprint.

Relationships like art, are living breathing things. When sculpting your optimal relationship and constructing frameworks for it, the mantra to consider is “the rule is no rule.” There are no right or wrong answers and there are no mistakes.

Joel and Diana have explored the nature of monogamy through their own path of questioning and exploration and have reached the conclusion that “casual sex is like candy. It’s easy, it tastes good, but it’s sticky and has its repercussions.” Playing with sex outside of your relationship is like playing with fire—it can be explosive and

real passion comes when we are playing on the interface of control and surrender

quite unpredictable. They recommend that if people are going to engage in casual sex, they need to know the risks. Because casual sex plays into the dynamics of one’s ego and the ego’s tendency to chase the fantasy, engaging in uncommitted intercourse plays into aspects of conquest and does not support communion and intimacy in the long-term.

Their take on the traditional framework of “marriage” is one that challenges many of our conventional ideals. If we were to remove the reign the traditional model places around relationships, looking even at marriage as a fear-based contract wherein we are “projecting our current ego state into the future,” as Diana often explains, then we grant the other person the freedom to do what is right for them and good for the relationship on their own terms. Diana believes that “if you try to control someone out of fear, they will end up feeling resentful and then the resentment will cause them to do the very things you fear, which is to be reactive, close down or whatever.” Often, when we give someone the freedom to exercise an option, they end up choosing not to exercise it at all. The key here is to let go and trust.

Without the existence of a contract that forbids or denies us to have or do something, we are free to do what we feel is ap-

² Yoga Journal; March 1979

appropriate in any given moment and for any particular domain. “The body’s potential responsiveness is limited by stiffness, lack of strength and endurance,” says Joel. “The mind’s responsiveness is limited by the way it thinks about things.” If we can use yoga to expand the body and open up the places that limit our physical freedom, so too can we use yoga to uncover the nature of what limits our thinking and perceiving when it comes to our relationships.

Often, ego fulfillment and short-term gratification are more trouble than they are worth. Like the story of the Tortoise and the Hare, slow and steady wins. This aphorism relates to relationships as much as it does in our yoga practice. Joel and Diana steadfastly believe that long-term relationships that endure sexual excursions may not be capable of achieving the kind of depth and intimacy we inherently long for. Maintaining integrity and not taking any short cuts pays off in the end. If you force yourself into a yoga posture or have a fling in the heat of the moment, your ego will be momentarily satiated but later, you may find yourself damp with remorse.

With a viable frame, anything is possible. There is not just one way of shaping a long-term, committed, harmonic relationship. We can make a variety of accommodations

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in very much the same way we adjust ourselves in a yoga posture. Joel talks about “the weakness of looking outside to the repeatable and mechanical aspects of experience” as it relates to the way that two people evolve in a relationship. The way we look doing a certain posture is not replicable in any other body and the dynamics of a relationship are no different.

Diana believes that having “frameworks that are functional” plays an essential role in a properly functioning relationship because “sex occurs within frameworks, cultural conditioning, sex roles, a whole history of baggage.” A healthy sexual relationship is not going to happen on its own, we need to be thinking about it and adjusting to its evolution.



ways to improve

Ultimately, the question we all need to ask ourselves is, “what is good material to work with?” Are you with someone who is in touch with who they are? Someone who you like working out with? Before engaging in a relationship, keep yourself in check. Determine how willing you really are to be fully open as this will translate directly into questions of control—how much control do you actually have or should have? Control is one way that the human brain works in terms of being self-protective and it is natural to feel a need to exercise some control, especially if you have been hurt in the past. “But passion, real passion,” as Diana beautifully explains, “comes when we let go of control and when we are playing on the interface of control and surrender. It is part of what the game of life is all about.”

Rather than forming contracts that cage love, Joel and Diana recommend creating

frameworks that protect it. The price of living is dying, the price of loving is risking the occurrence of what life brings. If you have curiosity, exploration, an aspiration to get to the bottom of things in yourself and in others, if you are truth seeking, if you have this broader framework of evolution, growth, honesty and integrity to explore together, then you have something that is very erotic and is a bonding all onto itself. If you have these things, then when you do have differences, you will have this broader context of exploration, of evolution and authenticity, of discovery and learning to work through the knots. And that is much stronger than anything a contract can provide.●



To learn more about Joel and Diana's upcoming seminars, visit yogitimes.com



1 Link your happiness with what is good for evolution.

2 **Fast openings bring fast closings.** Most reported injuries in yoga result from lack of concentration or an attempt to perform a difficult pose without working up to it. When two people come together and open up quickly, one person often continues opening faster than the other person can integrate. Sometimes one person is not emotionally prepared for intense emotional and physical connections. Slow openings give both partners time to integrate.

3 **Trust is a like a jewel and it must be protected.** It can be very difficult to get your partner's trust back once it has been broken. Although it is not impossible to gain someone's trust back, it does take time and requires the proper actions rather than the right words. Beware of the “mindfields” of mistrust, betrayal and resentment.

4 **Find the propitious circumstance, find good material to work with.** There are no formulas or panaceas for what works in a relationship. One thing is certain however, chemistry is erotic, it is a magical thing and we all need it. So find someone who you enjoy working out with, someone who is also a truth-seeker, someone who has objectivity and is seeking beyond just winning and getting his or her own way.



“just like a sunbeam can't separate itself from the sun, and a wave can't separate itself from the ocean, we can't separate ourselves from one another. we are all part of a vast sea of love, one indivisible divine mind”
—Marianne Williamson

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