Deeper Dating

Four Insights to Transform Your Search for Love

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Article 1: How Our Insecurities Can Reveal Our Deepest Gifts

Your Core Gifts: The Powerful, Unexpected Path To Love

In my decades of practice as a psychotherapist, this is the insight that has inspired me most:

Our deepest wounds surround our greatest gifts.
I've found that the very qualities we're most ashamed of, the ones we keep trying to reshape or hide, are in fact the key to finding real love. I call them Core Gifts, and I explore them in great detail in my book *Deeper Dating: How to Drop the Games of Seduction and Discover the Power of Intimacy*.

It's so easy to get lost in the quest for self-improvement. Every billboard seduces us with the vision of a happier, more successful life. I'm suggesting an opposite road to happiness. If we can name our own awkward, ardent gifts, and extricate them from the shame and wounds that keep them buried, we'll find ourselves on a bullet train to deep, surprising, life-changing intimacy.

Over the years, I realized that the characteristics of my clients which I found most inspiring, most essentially *them*, were the ones which frequently caused them the most suffering.
Some clients would complain of feeling like they were "too much"; too intense, too angry, or too demanding. From my therapist's chair, I would see a passion so powerful that it frightened people away.
Other clients said they felt that they felt like they were "not enough"; too weak, too quiet, too ineffective. I would find a quality of humility and grace in them which would not let them assert themselves as others did.

Clients would describe lives devastated by codependency, and I would see an immense generosity with no healthy limits.
Again and again, where my clients saw their greatest wounds, I also saw their most defining gifts!

Cervantes said that reading a translation is like viewing a tapestry from the back. That's what it's like when we try to understand our deepest struggles without honoring the gifts that fuel them.
When we understand our lives through the lens of our gifts it's as if we step out from behind the tapestry and really see it for the first time. All of a sudden, things make sense. We see the real picture, the moving, human story of what matters most to us. We begin to understand that our biggest mistakes, our most self-sabotaging behaviors were simply convulsive, unskilled attempts to express the deepest parts of ourselves.

Susan came to therapy after her boyfriend of two years left her. She had put the whole of her heart and all her energies into her relationship, and when it ended, she felt utterly destroyed. "Why can't I let go and move on like he did, or as my friends tell me I should?" she asked me on her first visit.

As she described her relationship history, I saw a consistent quality of kindness in her; a soft-heartedness which people kept taking advantage of. Susan appreciated these qualities in herself, but she also felt like they were a curse. (That very ambivalence is one of the main indicators of a core gift.) I sensed that a key to her healing lay precisely there. Again and again, we worked at helping her reframe her sensitivity not as a weakness, but as a gift that she-as well as her former partners-didn't know how to honor.

It sounds simple, but seeing these qualities as a gift was the foundation of new dating life for her. By seeing their worth, she could learn to understand, honor, and even treasure them.
When Susan looked at her life through the lens of her gift, she felt triumphant. "I was right all along!" she said. "Those things that bothered me about my boyfriends bothered me for a reason. I wasn't crazy. I just didn't honor my gift and I found men who were all too happy to agree with me."

I've named the approach I used with Susan "Gift Theory." The easiest way to explain Gift Theory is by starting with the image of a target. Every ring inward toward the center moves us closer to our most authentic self. In the center of the target, where the bull's-eye is, lie our core gifts.

Core gifts are not the same as talents or skills. In fact, until we understand them, they often feel like shameful weaknesses, or as parts of ourselves too vulnerable to expose. Yet they are where our soul lives. They are like the bone marrow of our psyche, generating a living stream of impulses toward intimacy and authentic self-expression. But gifts aren't hall-passes to happiness. They get us into trouble again and again. We become most defensive-or most naïve-around them. They challenge us and the people we care about. They ask more of us than we want to give. And we can be devastated when we feel them betrayed or rejected.

Since the heat of our core is so hard to handle, we protect ourselves by moving further out from the center. Each ring outward represents a more airbrushed version of ourselves. Each makes us feel safer, puts us at less risk of embarrassment, failure, and rejection. Yet, each ring outward also moves us one step further from our soul, our authenticity, and our sense of meaning. As we get further away from our core gifts, we feel more and more isolated. When we get too far, we experience a terrible sense of emptiness.

So, most of us set up shop at a point where we are close enough to be warmed by our gifts, but far enough away that we do not get burned by their fire. We create safer versions of ourselves to enable us to get through our lives without having to face the existential risk of our core.

The Gift Theory model invites us to discover what our core gifts are (most of us don't really know), to extricate these gifts from the wounds that keep them buried, and to express them with bravery, generosity, and discrimination in our dating life. When we do this, we find healthy love moving closer.

If you're looking for love, try to discover your own gifts. They shine in your joys and strengths, but they also live-and hide-right in the heart of your greatest insecurities and heartbreaks. If you learn to lead with them in your dating life, you will find-almost without trying-- that you're experiencing mutual attractions with people who love and treasure the very gifts you're discovering.

In future blogs, we'll explore in much greater detail how to discover your own core gifts. In the meantime, I invite you to take two or three minutes to reflect on the following question:

Are there essential qualities in you which have sometimes felt more like a curse than a gift? Perhaps you haven't known how to handle them, or maybe you've had the painful experience of other people misunderstanding or taking advantage of them. Take a minute to begin to put words on these qualities. As you name them, you'll learn to honor them, and you'll come to understand your struggles, your intimacy journey and your life story in a new way.

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Article 2: The Secret Story Behind Your Romantic Attractions

Discover your own myth of lost love.

Most of us create a personal "myth of lost love," to explain why love has hurt us in the past. Unexamined, this powerful myth leads to painful relationships with people who aren't good for us. Decoded, it illuminates our most tender, authentic self; the very self that can lead us to love. This post will help you discover your own myth of lost love.

The Myth Of Lost Love

What I call the "myth of lost love" is the life-defining story we created in childhood to explain why we were not loved as we needed to be. As most of us grew beyond the relative paradise of infancy, we found ourselves crashing into the painful wall of our parents' limitations. As this happened again and again (as it must, for we are all flawed and human) a curtain went down inside us. We lost our sense of being fully loved, for reasons we simply couldn't understand.
In an attempt to make sense of this pain, we created a personal "myth of lost love" (I describe this concept in greater detail in my book *Deeper Dating*.) As we grew into adults, this myth became a mold that shaped our romantic futures. At its heart, the myth of lost love is simply a child's attempt to identify the inner flaws that made love go away. Often these "flaws" turn out to be our greatest gifts.

Using the composite story of "Debbie", I'll take you, step by step, through an exploration of the three main aspects of the myth of lost love. At each intersection, I'll present you with a simple question. I encourage you not to hesitate--just answer each question as you go along. You don't have to write anything down, simply think about each question until ideas, insights and answers come to you. At the end of this post, you will have a richer sense of your own myth of lost love.

Debbie's Story

Debbie's relationships were filled with conflict. No relationships seemed to last. Either she or her partner would become too battle-scarred to continue. She came to therapy because she truly wanted a lasting relationship, but had lost hope of ever finding one.

Debbie's parents divorced when Debbie was just seven. Being a single parent with three older boys and one little girl to raise, Debbie's mother had limited energy for the subtleties of her intense daughter's inner life. She seemed stressed and harried almost all the time. Often, she would ignore or even rebuff her daughter's childlike attempts to bring her mother into her world. Debbie assumed she was loved, yet she never felt cherished. She was full of emotion, creativity and enthusiasm, but being repeatedly rebuffed made her become more and more withdrawn.

The truth was too much for Debbie to comprehend or to bear: Her mother wasn't particularly interested in her sensitivity and creativity. So Debbie developed a private story to explain her mothers' rejection, and to protect herself from experiencing such shameful pain again. Debbie's myth, like most of ours, had three distinct parts; a belief in the unsafety of love, a blaming of self, and a set of strategies designed to protect her from further pain.

Part One: Love Is Unsafe

Debbie could only remember a few times in her life that her mother had shown her real tenderness, yet she had many memories of feeling humiliated when she showed her "soft side." As a result, Debbie grew up experiencing the world as a cold place, a place where true tenderness was unattainable.

• *What parts of you were not understood or appreciated in your family? What parts were overlooked, taken advantage of, or even abused? • What lessons did this teach you about the world? • What betrayals are you still on the lookout for?*

Part Two: We Are To Blame

Second, the myth of lost love explains why this is all our fault. As a child, Debbie had no way of knowing that her mother was the problem. In a child's land, the parent is God. So she explained her mother's limitations in the way that made sense to her. "She's right. There is something wrong with me."

Then, our myth of lost love continues its path of damage by telling us exactly what makes us unworthy of love. Most of us will be in battle with that message for much of our lives. Debbie's myth explained what was wrong with her in the most crippling terms. It homed in on her most vulnerable, needy, and nonconforming qualities - her core gifts of tenderness and passionate emotionality - and convinced her that those very gifts were to blame for her loss of love. It taught her that her vulnerability and intensity were humiliating traits that made her unlovable.

• *What did you tell yourself was wrong with you? • Which fundamental aspects of yourself did you become ashamed of, or learn to hide?*

Part Three: We We Can Protect Ourselves

Third, our myth of lost love explains how we can defend ourselves from an unsafe world. As a child Debbie learned not to rail against her mother's coldness. She tried to be the best little girl in the world. But the anger that took root in Debbie as a child came to full bloom in Debbie as an adult. Although she was still trying to be the best little girl in the world, she also vowed never to be humiliated again. Instead, whenever she felt too vulnerable, she would mount a pre-emptive strike and, in the process, her over-the-top anger would undermine and eventually destroy every budding relationship.

• *How did you learn to protect yourself from being hurt again? • What pre-emptive actions do you take to protect your tender core? (Usually, typical defenses include withdrawal, suppressing feelings, anger and the use of manipulation)*

The Heart of The Story: Your Core Gifts

At one point in therapy, Debbie had an insight which changed the course of her intimacy life. She recalled a childhood experience. She was about four years old, and she found a Monarch butterfly, dead on the pavement. She picked it up, crying, and brought it to her aunt. Her aunt, a very cold person, looked at Debbie's's tear-stained face and began to laugh. In fury, Debbie acted without thinking. She dropped the butterfly, hauled off and slugged her aunt!
As Debbie told me this story, her tears began to flow, but they were mixed with understanding laughter. She finally recognized the message of this story, and it helped her understand her entire relationship history.

Her insight was about her tender heart-and the passionate fury that surfaced when that tender heart was spurned. Her hair-trigger temper finally began to make sense. Now, she could begin to work more wisely with the anger she felt every time her soul felt unrecognized.

Embracing Our Core Gifts

As an adult, Debbie had learned to despise the gifts at the core of her identity. She believed, quite wrongly, that her vulnerability, her tenderness, and her sensitivity were weaknesses that she "must overcome." In fact, they were Debbie's greatest strengths. They were the language with which she expressed love, and so all her efforts to "overcome" or suppress them ultimately failed.

Those gifts were a central part of Debbie's whole being. As far as she tried to get away from them, and as successful as she became without them, an invisible string always kept her attached to them. At a certain point, the string just stopped stretching. She realized that she hadn't found the love she wanted, that the life she had dreamed of was passing her by. She felt an inexplicable emptiness inside--and she didn't know what to do about it.

• *What are the gifts you thought you had to hide or control in order to find love? • What parts of you are you most afraid will be taken advantage of, mocked, or ignored?*

Core Gifts And The Search For Romantic Love

In therapy Debbie realized that by disdaining her core gifts she was in fact disdaining herself. She discovered that her most intense attractions were with people who, like herself, hadn't learned to value vulnerability, tenderness or sensitivity! She had wasted years of her life trying to get men to love her who were as ambivalent toward her gifts as she was. Finally, she realized that disavowing her core gifts would never get her the genuine intimacy she desired.

Debbie's task at that point was to find her way back to the gifts she had left behind, to identify them, to cherish them, to let them lead her to a partner who could also recognize and treasure her gifts. This is not an easy process, but it is part of the heroic journey to genuine intimacy.

In my years as a therapist, I've seen that the more we hide our core gifts, the more we will find ourselves with people who also devalue those gifts. Conversely, to the degree we embrace, treasure, and reclaim these gifts, we somehow find - and stay with - people who love us for who we are.

This is where the path to intimacy becomes almost binary. We can follow what I call our attractions of deprivation, choosing partners who almost love us, who sometimes accept us for who we are, and who are somewhat available-and then we can prove our worth by getting them to love us. This route is otherwise known as the path to hell. Or instead, we can choose someone who treasures and validates our core gifts with relative consistency. These attractions are what I call attractions of inspiration, and they are, quite simply, the path to real love. They may not seem as exciting at first, because there is less of a chase involved, but they are the way to find happiness in love. Each of these two forms of attraction follows its own trajectory (attractions of inspiration need to be cultivated in ways that few of us are taught. More about this in future posts.)

• *Who in your life has consistently valued your "core gifts?" • What has it been like to have a relationship like that?*

The more you follow your attractions of inspiration, the more you will

find people who love you for who you are, and this is the greatest way to learn to love yourself. As you learn to build relationships with kind and available people, and learn to forsake the thrilling seductiveness of attractions of deprivation, your childhood myth will gradually lose its force, and your entire romantic journey will change for the better.

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Article 3: How to Develop Your Attraction to the Right Person

You know who would be good for you. So why aren't you attracted to them?

We can’t force our sexual attractions. Most of us have learned that the hard way.

Yet, as I describe in my book *Deeper Dating*, there’s something profound that most of us have never been taught: Although our sexual attractions can’t be controlled, they *can* be educated. This post will share some ways to cultivate sexual and romantic attraction to people who are kind, respectful—and available. Even if you’re relentlessly attracted to bad-boys or bad-girls, or to unavailable people, you can still develop this capacity. And these are not gimmicks; they are the lifelong skills of romance and intimacy—the very same skills you'll use to keep passion alive in your next serious relationship.

The Attraction Spectrum

Every time we enter a room full of people, we make choices based upon our attractions: Whom do we notice? Whom do we pass over? Deb, a young stockbroker from Chicago, once told me:
“You know, it’s almost magical. I can go to a party, and there’s always one person I’m most attracted to. If I date him, within a few weeks or a few months I discover he has the same emotional qualities as my previous partner. But when I first saw him from across the room, I had no idea at all that this would be true!”

Our attractions are forged in the deep space of our being, born of countless, often unknowable forces. When we encounter someone for the first time, our psyche and heart begin an astonishingly complex scan, picking up obvious cues like physique and facial structure, but also noting myriad subtle cues such as body language, facial expression, the contour of the lips, the nuance of the voice, and the muscles around the eyes. We instantly process this information without even knowing it. All we feel is desire or the lack of it.

Scientists tell us that a silkworm can smell one other silkworm moth of the opposite sex from six-and-a-half miles away. Our mating instinct may not be that developed, but nature has programmed our romantic radar with the sensitivity to find just the right person to trigger whatever emotional circuitry we need to work through.

All of us are attracted to a certain type that stops us dead in our tracks, be it a physical type, an emotional type, or a personality type. Let's say that there is a "spectrum of attraction," from 1 to 10; the people at the far end aren't physically or romantically attractive to us at all, but those at the upper end are icons—they're compellingly attractive, leaving us weak in the knees and triggering both our longing and our insecurity.

Harville Hendrix, founder of Imago Therapy, illuminates this phenomenon in a way which sheds light on our entire intimacy journey. He teaches that these people are so attractive to us in part because they embody not only the best, but also the *worst* emotional characteristics of our parents.

All of us have unresolved childhood hurts due to betrayal, anger, manipulation, or abuse. Unconsciously, we seek healing through our partner. And we try to achieve this healing by bonding with someone we sense might hurt us in similar ways to how we were hurt as children, in the hope that we can then convince him or her to finally love and accept us.

Our conscious self is drawn to the positive *qualities we yearn for, but our unconscious draws us to the qualities which remind us of how we were* wounded *the most.*

This partly explains why we get so awkward and insecure around people to whom we're intensely attracted. It also explains why our greatest heartbreaks often occur with these most intense, fiery attractions. Some of us react to past heartbreaks by dating only those on the low end of our attraction spectrum; we're frightened of the intensity and the risk of painful loss when we approach people on the higher end. We often feel safest with people who don't do much for us on a physical or romantic level because it just feels more

comfortable—but the downside can be boredom, frustration, and a lack of passion.

Many others only date people on the high end of their attraction spectrum, because they believe that's where real love and passion lie. With someone who is a "high number" on your attraction spectrum, you can tell that you're attracted in a fraction of a second. This can be achingly exciting, but it's rarely comfortable or secure. *In my experience, people who only date those on the high end of their attraction spectrum are much more likely to remain single.* By contrast, however, attraction to people in the middle of our spectrum is rarely immediate; it usually takes more time to get a sense of how interested we really are in such people.

People who are *willing* to date in the mid-range are more likely to find real and lasting love. It's not a matter of selling out, because immediate attraction isn't the best forecaster of future passion. Intense immediate attractions can blind us to the actual *quality* of our interactions with others, and to the actual characters of the people we date.

Attractions can grow—and many of us have had the experience of becoming *more* attracted to someone as we got to know him or her better.

Cultivating Attractions of Inspiration

So what do we do when we meet someone who inspires us, and we feel some spark of attraction, but not enough to fall in love? Sexual attraction is much more mutable than we've been taught. We all have types that turn us on immediately and intensely. But as I said, attractions can grow. It's doubtful that you'll become attracted to someone who isn't at all physically appealing to you. But if someone holds a spark of attraction for you, and has other qualities you love, your attraction can blossom. If you're meeting someone for the first time, don't make a snap decision based upon whether you're instantly attracted on a physical level. If you're not sure, go out with them again. In time, something lovely may happen: He or she may actually become more beautiful to you. And if not, you'll know that it's time to stop dating them.

If you've ever seen artists working on a portrait, you will notice that they often squint. Squinting helps them focus on the essence of their subject without getting distracted by its harsh outlines. We need to do the same in our dating life. It's so easy to get lost in the hard assessment of people's imperfections, but it serves us better to simply sense their spirit. That is what makes attractions grow.
As we start to care more deeply about someone, invisible tendrils begin to grow in our thinking, in our sexual imaginings and longings, in our growing sense of dependence on that person. Our psyche, our sexuality, and our hearts begin to create attachment to that person, to make him or her our own.

When we build a muscle through exercise, our body creates new capillaries to feed it. When we create new love, something similar happens. New neural pathways, emotional pathways, new rituals, sense memories, and needs get created. An entire web of new connections is created, as our hearts allow this once-stranger to become our loved one. We become specialized in them in so many ways. That's why breakups can hurt with real physical pain—these lovingly-built tendrils are ripped out, and that experience is anguish.
In many attractions of inspiration, it can take time for our attraction to build. In such cases, it can be difficult to resist fleeing in search of something more clear-cut. As a result, many potentially wonderful relationships are cut off before ever being given a chance. The truth is that we can deepen our healthy attractions, and intensify their passion.

The more we focus on the things that trigger our desire, the more our passion can build. If there's a spark of attraction to someone, and you want to make that attraction grow, start by giving yourself space. No matter how wonderful the person, you're not obligated to be more attracted to him or her than you are. Forcing your feelings will only block the natural flow of attraction. Instead, allow yourself to reflect on what attracts you to them—what turns you on and what you appreciate.

Think emotionally, but think physically too. Take time to let your fantasies unfurl. You might simply want to hold hands at the movies. Or to kiss, or just gently touch for a long time. You might imagine

quick hot sex or long, lazy sex Honor whatever you're imagining, and, as appropriate, see if you can ask for what you want—that's how we can grow our passion.

My advice: When we desire someone and then postpone the sex (for at least five or six dates), surprising new pathways of attraction form. It's a great way to grow passion. More important, having sex too early is like Miracle-Gro for any fear of intimacy we might have. It makes us want to flee. So go slowly on the outside, but allow yourself free rein in your fantasy life.

And if your desire is more sensual than sexual, that's fine too. A client of mine met a man who lives in Europe. She knew she liked him but she wasn't attracted enough to want sex. She just wanted to cuddle. He invited her to visit but she wasn't sure if she should make the trip. Speaking to her dating buddy, she said, "I don't know if I should go all the way to Europe just to cuddle with someone." Her wise friend replied, "Really? I can't think of a better reason to go to Europe!" My client took the trip, and over time, fell deeply in love. She was wise enough to take all the time she needed, and he was wise enough to let her.

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Article 4: The Two Best Questions For Your Sex Life

Discovering new portals to more meaningful sex

Often, the questions we ask of ourselves are what finally carve the shape of our lives. A great question excites us, opens new doors, and invites both compassion and curiosity. I'd like to offer two such questions about sex. Your answers will teach you rich lessons about your sex life—and more.

These two questions are simple. In fact, they are obvious. They are also gentle, yet, like so many gentle things, they have the power to change us deeply. (Perhaps this is why we spend so much time avoiding them!) However, as with any real adventure, the first consideration is safety. Please read the caveats at the end of this post. If any apply to you, consider getting support before doing the deeper work these questions invite.

The first question is this: **What turns you on most in sex?**

Frequently, our sexual turn-ons just don't fit our self-image. We might fantasize about being sexually submissive, but feel humiliated by that desire. Or we might fantasize about being sexually dominant, but feel afraid of who that makes us. Perhaps the things which truly excite us are embarassing because they are just so "vanilla;" so uninventive and basic. Whether exotic or not, our deepest erotic sparks are portals to a deeper experience of sex and of self.

Often, these sexual portals illumine parts of ourselves we just don't know what do with. Few of us have been taught how to handle our most evocative sexual fantasies in a creative, celebratory, non-destructive way. Sometimes, we may judge our most colorful desires as odd, even perverted.

David Schechter, theater director and lyricist for the recent Broadway musical "Soul Doctor," rescues the word perverse by proposing a lovely twist to it. Schechter asks, "What if perverse means 'per-

verse'—or, 'through poetry?'" When we explore our wild side, we play in a landscape of sexual poetry; a world of inner symbolism which may never make conscious sense but which still feels gratifying and meaningful. The majority of us need help in embracing our wild side in sex, and in distinguishing between behaviors which are harmful to us or our partner, and those which are simply—and wonderfully—"per-verse" So, take a moment to think what kinds of sex excites you most. What actions, what body parts, what behaviors—what outfits?

Allow yourself the freedom of play in your reflections. You will probably hit some waves of discomfort as you go. Track them; if they are too disturbing, it may be best to enlist the support of a skilled, credentialed and non-judgmental psychotherapist. If your fantasies just feel embarrassing, surprising, or out of the pale, see if you can imagine embracing them. Whatever they are, I assure you that there are others who share the same turn-ons, and with whom sharing those turn-ons would be an experience of mutual delight. Our partner (or if we are single, our future partner) has hidden desires of his or her own! Following our own deeper turn-ons, including ones we have been timid about exploring, can help deepen and enrich our entire sexual experience.

Here is the second question: **What touches you most deeply in sex?**

This is a marvelous question, and one that every sexual adult should enjoy, relish and reflect upon. Interestingly,for reasons I describe in greater detail in my new book *Deeper Dating: How to Drop The Games of Seduction and Discover the Power of Intimacy,* it often leaves us feeling more vulnerable than the previous one.

Have you ever been emotionally touched during sex in a way that took you by surprise? Have you ever been moved to the point of tears, or felt a sense of love which overtook you? Have you ever had the feeling of lust and love fused together? Has your sex ever left sex far behind? (If you haven't yet experienced this, just imagine what it would be like.) What happened to create that experience? Try to think back and remember. It will tell you worlds about who you are and your deepest sexual gifts.

Are there parts of your body which, when touched in a certain way, trigger deep emotions? Is there a pacing in sex which touches and moves you deeply? If you are partnered, what touches your partner most deeply in sex?

When Jill and her husband (at that time, her boyfriend) first had sex, he did something which felt odd to her. In the middle of enthusiastic sex, he began to slow down, and then stopped moving altogether. He enwrapped her in his arms as he lay on top of her, and then—he lay perfectly still. She assumed he hadn't climaxed, so she was bewildered, but she went with the moment. As they lay motionless in their embrace, she felt something begin to shake inside her. Out of nowhere, she began to weep. They clung fiercely together, neither knowing what hit them. This beautiful ritual became a hallmark of many episodes of their sexual expression through the years.

In sex and in life, most us are both more wild and more tender than we feel comfortable with. Both aspects of our sexuality are portals to our deepest self and our richer expression in the world. You can ask yourself these two questions during sex as a way to guide you and your partner to those portals of intimacy: What expressions would touch me and my partner most deeply on a emotional level? How can we follow the trail of our deep turn-ons at this moment?

When we avoid risk by hiding our most vulnerable sexual needs, we diminish the intimacy between us and our partner. When we give up our deep authenticity to keep things safe, sex becomes bland and we start retreating from it. When experimentation dies, Eros dies along with it. As much as you can, bring Eros into the relationship. That means sharing with your partner the things in sex that move you most deeply, that turn you on most intensely. It means listening for the same with your partner, and moving step by step together to the sexual soul of your relationship. Whatever stage you're in, in the continuum from single to committed couple, you can use these questions to deepen your sexuality. You can experiment with these ideas in your sex life, your marriage, or your masturbation fantasies. *Bon adventure* in your journey to a richer and more emotionally gratifying sex life!

Note: All of the above ideas are predicated upon the foundation of

emotional and physical safety. If you are in a relationship which is in any way abusive or if you are at risk of engaging in sexual behaviors which may cause harm to others or yourself; if any of these questions bring up strong feelings of disturbance, or if you are suffering from an untreated psychiatric disorder, please seek the help of a skilled and credentialed psychotherapist/psychiatrist before delving into these exercises.

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