



OVERCOMING OUR RELATIONSHIP FEARS

Lawrence E. Hedges

Ph.D., Psy. D., ABPP

Overcoming our Relationship
Fears

Breaking the Bondage of Relationship
Fears

By Lawrence E. Hedges, Ph.D., Psy.D., ABPP

About the Author



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including *Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy*; *Facing the Challenge of Liability in Psychotherapy: Practicing Defensively* and *Sex in Psychotherapy: Sexuality, Passion, Love and Desire in the Therapeutic Encounter*.

About Lawrence Hedges' Other Books

Terrifying Transferences: Aftershocks of Childhood Trauma

There is a level of stark terror known to one degree or another by all human beings. It silently haunts our lives and occasionally surfaces in therapy. It is this deep-seated fear--often manifest in dreams or fantasies of dismemberment, mutilation, torture, abuse, insanity, rape, or death--that grips us with the terror of being lost forever in time and space or controlled by hostile forces stronger than ourselves. Whether the terror is felt by the client or by the therapist, it has a disorienting, fragmenting, crippling power. How we can look directly into the face of such terror, hold steady, and safely work it through is the subject of *Terrifying Transferences*. Contributing therapists: Linda Barnhurst, John Carter, Shirley Cox, Jolyn Davidson, Virginia Hunter, Michael Reyes, Audrey Seaton-Bacon, Sean Stewart, Gayle Trenberth, and Cynthia Wygal.

Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy

In a fresh and innovative format Hedges organizes an exhaustive overview of contemporary psychoanalytic and object relations theory and clinical practice. “In studying the Listening Perspectives of therapists, the author has identified himself with the idea that one must sometimes change the Listening Perspective and also the interpreting, responding perspective.” –Rudolf Ekstein, Ph.D. Contributing therapists: Mary Cook, Susan Courtney, Charles Coverdale, Arlene Dorius, David Garland, Charles Margach, Jenna Riley, and Mary E. Walker. Now available in a Twentieth Anniversary edition, the book has become a classic in the field.

Working the Organizing Experience

Hedges defines in a clear and impelling manner the most fundamental and treacherous transference phenomena, the emotional experiences retained from the first few months of life. Hedges describes the infant’s attempts to reach out and form organizing connections to the interpersonal environment and how those attempts may have been ignored, thwarted, and/or rejected. He demonstrates how people live out these primitive transferences in everyday significant relationships and in the psychotherapy relationship. James Grotstein contributes a critical history of psychotherapy with primitive transferences and a case study is contributed by Frances Tustin.

Interpreting the Countertransference

Hedges boldly studies countertransference as a critical tool for therapeutic understanding. “Hedges clearly and beautifully delineates the components and forms of countertransference and explicates the technique of carefully proffered countertransference informed interventions...[He takes the view] that all countertransferences, no matter how much they belong to the analyst, are unconsciously evoked by the patient.”--James Grotstein, M.D. Contributing therapists: Anthony Brailow, Karen K. Redding, and Howard Rogers.

In Search of the Lost Mother of Infancy

“Organizing transferences” in psychotherapy constitute a living memory of a person’s earliest relatedness experiences and failures. Infant research and psychotherapeutic studies from the past two decades makes it now possible to define for therapeutic analysis the manifestations of early contact traumas. A history and summary of the Listening Perspective approach to psychotherapy introduces the book. Contributing therapists: Bill Cone, Cecile Dillon, Francie Marais, Sandra Russell, Sabrina Salayz, Jacki Singer, Sean Stewart, Ruth Wimsatt, and Marina Young.

Strategic Emotional Involvement

Following an overview of contemporary approaches to studying countertransference responsiveness, therapists tell moving stories of how their work came to involve them deeply, emotionally, and not always safely with clients. These comprehensive, intense, and honest reports are the first of their kind ever to be collected and published. Contributing therapists: Anthony Brailow, Suzanne Buchanan, Charles Coverdale, Carolyn Crawford, Jolyn Davidson, Jacqueline Gillespie, Ronald Hirz, Virginia Hunter, Gayle Trenberth, and Sally Turner-Miller.

Therapists At Risk: Perils of the Intimacy of the Therapeutic Relationship

Lawrence E. Hedges, Robert Hilton, and Virginia Wink Hilton, long-time trainers of psychotherapists, join hands with attorney O. Brandt Caudill in this *tour de force*, which explores the multitude of personal, ethical, and legal risks involved in achieving rewarding transformative connections in psychotherapy today. Relational intimacy is explored through such issues as touching, dualities in relationship, interfacing boundaries, sexuality, countertransference, recovered memories, primitive transferences, false accusations against therapists, and the critical importance of peer support and consultation. The authors clarify the many dynamic issues involved, suggest useful ways of managing the

inherent dangers, and work to restore our confidence in and natural enjoyment of the psychotherapeutic process.

Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through Childhood Trauma: The Psychodynamics of Recovered Memories, Multiple Personality, Ritual Abuse, Incest, Molest, and Abduction

Infantile focal as well as strain trauma leave deep psychological scars that show up as symptoms and memories later in life. In psychotherapy people seek to process early experiences that lack ordinary pictorial and narrational representations through a variety of forms of transference and dissociative remembering such as multiple personality, dual relating, archetypal adventures, and false accusations against therapists or other emotionally significant people. “Lawrence Hedges makes a powerful and compelling argument for why traumatic memories recovered during psychotherapy need to be taken seriously. He shows us how and why these memories must be dealt with in thoughtful and responsible ways and not simply uncritically believed and used as tools for destruction.”---Elizabeth F. Loftus, Ph.D.

Facing the Challenge of Liability in Psychotherapy: Practicing Defensively

In this litigious age, all psychotherapists must protect themselves against the possibility of legal action; malpractice insurance is

insufficient and does not begin to address the complexity and the enormity of this critical problem. In this book, Lawrence E. Hedges urges clinicians to practice defensively and provides a course of action that equips them to do so. After working with over a hundred psychotherapists and attorneys who have fought unwarranted legal and ethical complaints from clients, he has made the fruits of his work available to all therapists. In addition to identifying those patients prone to presenting legal problems, Dr. Hedges provides a series of consent forms (on the accompanying disk), a compelling rationale for using them, and a means of easily introducing them into clinical practice. This book is a wake-up call, a practical, clinically sound response to a frightening reality, and an absolute necessity for all therapists in practice today. Now available in a revised and updated edition.

Sex in Psychotherapy: Sexuality, Passion, Love, and Desire in the Therapeutic Encounter

This book takes a psychodynamic approach to understanding recent technological and theoretical shifts in the field of psychotherapy. Hedges provides an expert overview and analysis of a wide variety of new perspectives on sex, sexuality, gender, and identity; new theories about sex's role in therapy; and new discoveries about the human brain and how it works. Therapists will value Hedges' unique insights into the role of sexuality in

therapy, which are grounded in the author's studies of neurology, the history of sexuality, transference, resistance, and countertransference. Clinicians will also appreciate his provocative analyses of influential perspectives on sex, gender, and identity, and his lucid, concrete advice on the practice of therapeutic listening. This is an explosive work of tremendous imagination and scholarship. Hedges speaks the uncomfortable truth that psychotherapy today often reinforces the very paradigms that keep patients stuck in self-defeating, frustrating behavior. He sees sexuality as a vehicle for both therapists and patients to challenge what they think they know about the nature of self and intimacy. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding 21st century human beings—or in better understanding themselves and their sexuality.

OTHER BOOKS IN PRESS AND PREPARATION:

Cross-Cultural Encounters: Bridging Worlds of Difference

Creating and Maintaining Intimacy in Long-term Relationships

Overcoming Relationship Fears Workbook

The Courage to Relate

The Relationship in Psychotherapy and Supervision

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Created in the United States of America

For information regarding this book, contact the publisher:

International Psychotherapy Institute E-Books
301-215-7377
6612 Kennedy Drive
Chevy Chase, MD 20815-6504
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To Stephen Dedalus

Stephen, the first to break the bonds of patriarchal religion

Dedalus, the first to break the bonds of mother Earth

I, too, must free my spirit, my soul, myself

From the deadening bonds of parental fears

James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| About the Author | 3 |
| About Lawrence Hedges' Other Books..... | 4 |
| Preface | 15 |
| Chapter One | 23 |
| <i>Paralyzed by Fear on 9/11 23</i> | |
| Chapter Two: | 31 |
| <i>Mapping the Seven Deadly Fears in Your BMR Connection 31</i> | |
| <i>Summary Chart: The Seven Deadly Fears 35</i> | |
| Chapter Three | 40 |
| <i>Dave Fights His Way Out of Fear 40</i> | |
| Chapter Four | 50 |
| <i>Fear in the BMR Connection—Destructive Hangovers from the Past 50</i> | |
| Chapter Five | 56 |
| <i>Experience Your BMR Connection: Putting On Your Aliveness Monitor 56</i> | |
| Chapter Six | 60 |
| <i>Experience Your BMR Connection: Touching Base with Your Body 60</i> | |
| Chapter Seven | 72 |

I Dreamed of Being Scared to Death 72

Chapter Eight..... 80

1. *The Fear of Being Alone* 80
2. *The Fear of Connecting* 92
3. *The Fear of Being Abandoned* 107
4. *The Fear of Self-Assertion* 122
5. *The Fear of Lack of Recognition* 134
6. *The Fear of Failure and Success* 146
7. *The Fear of Being Fully Alive* 163

Chapter Nine 176

We Are the Intimate Species 176

Preface

By the time we are adults most of us have come to know the power of fear. On the positive side fear can prevent us from putting ourselves in harm's way. On the negative side, fear can prevent us from putting our personal truths and needs out there. Fear often even stops us from pursuing the best in ourselves. And fear can make our relationships literally Hell on Earth. If only we could learn to master our fears instead of they mastering us.

Whether we like it or not, fear is ever present in our lives in one way or another. But I believe that we can come to a better understanding of how fear works for and against us. And that out of this understanding we can improve our power of choice, thus releasing the mysterious hold our fears have over us. That is what this book is about.

We begin by listening to our bodies. By the end of a long day or at the close of a hard week we all know exactly where in our bodies we feel the hidden effects of relationship fear—in our muscular tightness, aches, and pains. Some days different parts of our bodies carry the tension—our foreheads, our eyes, our chests, our legs, our feet or our joints. When we are

having a particularly difficult week we may even wake up in the morning exhausted with our bodies aching all over. We know that we have been tense and restless throughout the night working over the trials and tribulations of the day. But in all of this we seldom stop to realize that our particular tensions are caused by habitual patterns of muscle constriction that started as fears in our early childhoods and have continued to expand unchecked throughout our growing up years into the present.

Most of us do not know what is at the bottom of our physical distresses or how to begin achieving relief on a daily basis. We may, however, be able to identify certain kinds of events that are likely to cause tensions. For example, Maria can count on lower back pain after work if she spends more than three hours a day on her computer. Josh can count on sore muscles in his neck and upper back on staff meeting days when he struggles to speak his piece while maintaining his composure. On days when Virginia has two-hour meetings scheduled with her boss she knows that her jaw will hurt and her throat will be tense by dinnertime.

You may have already started noticing your daily tensions and begun relating them to what is going on in your life at the time. But what may well be new to you in this book is the potential importance of:

- Thinking systematically about what happens in your relationships throughout the day,
- Considering meaningfully how your body registers those relationship events, and
- Expanding creatively your awareness of your body-mind-relationship (BMR) connections.

As a therapist I have listened to people talk about themselves for forty years. In the process I have become convinced that our fears limit and cripple all of us in many ways. And that we are usually quite unaware of the profound effect our fears have on our entire beings. In this book I show how you can identify and break free from long-standing fear reflexes that persist and threaten your sense of wellbeing and indeed your health and longevity.

One evening swimming laps in my pool after a particularly trying day, I was doing my best not to think about some trying problems in several of my relationships. But while I was breathing

deeply and stretching energetically into my laps, I slowly became painfully aware of a number of muscle contractions in different parts of my body. Each knot seemed clearly related to some challenge I was facing in one of my relationships that day. In a flash I suddenly realized that my body is at all times enmeshed in my relationships. What? Yes, I realized that my body is at all times meaningfully enmeshed in my daily relationships!

I have taught for many years that our minds are enmeshed in our relationships—whether we have noticed that or not. So that if we want to know ourselves well we have to pay close attention to how we live our relationships. This is partly because our minds originally developed in the context of our early emotional relationships. And partly it is because every day of our lives we struggle in one way or another with important relationships.

But what I had not seen until swimming those laps was not only that the body-mind split is artificial, but that *our bodies as well as our minds are at all times totally enmeshed in our relationships*. I had discovered in the exercise pool the reality of

the body-mind-relationship (BMR) connection while thinking about some upsetting relationship issues and simultaneously experiencing a variety of frightening and painful physical sensations in my body.

This should not be so surprising to us. After all, don't we live our entire lives in various kinds of emotionally-tinged relationships? And don't we know altogether too well the daily ups and downs of our relationships? We know too that we are deeply connected to others through our emotions. But in the pool when I connected upsetting relationship concerns with painful physical sensations, I realized something else—that *the most important body-mind-relationship connection is fear*. I have since realized that relationship fears connect us to others and dominate our bodies and our lives far more than we care to imagine!

Modern knowledge is clear—we are body-minds. In the past it may have been helpful to separate mind from body in order to understand how different we are from the other animals. But as we have come to value what is uniquely human we have gradually lost

track of our life in our bodies. For example, the way our food is prepared and marketed moves us away from healthy eating and drinking. Watching TV and surfing the web take us away from invigorating physical and aerobic activities. But, as we will soon discover, there is much more—especially in the way our body-minds are continuously enmeshed in our distressing emotionally significant relationships.

Not wanting to think of ourselves as fearful, it seems that we have turned away from noticing on a moment-to-moment basis how deeply our emotional involvements with others affect us. We then choose not to notice how much fear is stimulated by our relationships and what a toll our fears take on us.

When people first hear that I have written a book about *Seven Deadly Fears* I am frequently asked, “why seven fears? Is that a magic number? Aren’t there dozens of things out there to be afraid of, if not hundreds?” My answer is that seven basic relationship fears have emerged from more than a century of people studying their minds, bodies, and relationships in psychotherapy and in

various kinds of physical therapies and body work. As you read on you will get a full sense of the seven distinctly different kinds of relationship fears that have been discovered. You will then be able to begin noticing these seven fears as they show up in your daily body-mind-relationship experiences.

“Why *deadly* fears?” some people ask me. The answer to that question is not obvious at first. Relationship fears are deadly because the fears we experience in emotionally significant relationships set up patterns of muscle constriction in various places in our bodies. Patterns of tissue constriction--once established--tend to recur frequently and to persist for a lifetime. These uniquely personal patterns of habitual tissue constriction or fear reflexes affect our health, our wellbeing, and our longevity. It is well known that constrictive fear reflexes are energy consuming and that over time they often lead to serious tissue damage. In the end fear reflexes contribute to or even cause debilitating diseases that can indeed be lethal. It’s that simple.

I hope you enjoy and find useful the ideas and experiences I have pulled together in this book. Write me and let me know what you have discovered!

Larry Hedges

Modjeska Canyon, California, January 2012

www.ListeningPerspectives.com

Chapter One

Paralyzed by Fear on 9/11

On Tuesday morning September 11, 2001 my daughter Breta called in frantic, heaving sobs to tell me of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Telephone gripped in hand, I raced to the TV in time to witness live the second tower hit and to hear Breta's terrified screaming through the receiver. Not only was I stricken by what I was witnessing on the television, but I was paralyzed with another kind of fear—the fear of being utterly helpless, of being completely unable to do anything to buffer the terror that was shattering my beloved daughter. I yearned to hold Breta, to take her into my arms and quell the fear like when she was a little girl with the forest next to our home going up in giant flames—I held her tightly then, both of us shaking in helpless horror watching the fire fighters struggling to quench the blaze threatening to destroy our home.

But on 9/11 I was utterly helpless—there was absolutely nothing I could to do to restore the World Trade Center or my daughter's fragmenting sense of safety and peace of mind.

We all experienced the paralyzing effects of fear on that fateful day—eyes wide open, hearts racing, lungs tight, guts wrenched, muscles tight, and a total body weakness and body-mind numbness that lasted for weeks and that will never leave us completely.

In the wake of the attack one of my therapy clients spent two days curled up in the bottom of her closet, like she used to as a small child after her alcoholic father had abused her. Another client re-lived a tragic teenage freeway accident in which his four closest friends had been instantly killed while he, the driver and sole survivor, had lived on in helpless loneliness and guilt. One woman re-agonized the prolonged cancer death of her mother when she was four years old, remembering feeling that her bad behavior was killing her mother. After 9/11 she had again heard her mother's screams of intractable pain and terror of dying. No matter how good she was, no matter how hard she tried, it was not enough to keep mother from leaving her forever.

I asked each client the week of 9/11 where the attack had taken them. Everyone recalled horrifying memories from earlier in life

that had resurfaced in response to that terrible moment. When asked where in their bodies they were feeling the pain, the agony, the terror—everyone knew exactly what parts of their body had taken the hit. Some had chest or abdominal pain, others had headaches, tight jaws, back pain, joint pains, asthma attacks, muscle spasms, or whatever—the list went on.

What became absolutely clear to me after 9/11 was that each of us has our own unique way of experiencing fear. And that our individual patterns of fear live on as destructive hangovers from childhood relationship experiences to impact our bodies in highly personal and specific ways.

People in therapy had long ago shown me how childhood trauma interferes with later intimate relationships. But the 9/11 terrorist attacks revealed that all of us have deeply buried personal patterns of fear left over from earlier experiences that can be reactivated on a moment's notice—relationship fears that are physical as well as mental.

Airplanes being down, I made the 12-hour drive to Albuquerque to keep my Saturday speaking commitment with the New Mexico Psychoanalytic Society on my new book, *Terrifying Transferences: Aftershocks of Childhood Trauma*. The topic could not have been timelier—we were all in aftershock. As therapists that week we had all heard story after story of childhood trauma revisited—not to mention having our own traumatic reactions and re-experiencing our own childhood horrors.

Given the emotionally charged circumstances that day, I opened the floor first thing in the morning for venting about our trying week. I listened carefully as therapist after therapist told of traumatic reactions they had been witness to in their consulting rooms following the Tuesday disaster.

As I listened to the stories therapists told that day, one more critical thing about fear and trauma emerged—we have more power over our fears than we think!

The New Mexico therapists were well experienced in how to intervene to help people re-experience long-buried fear reactions

being revived in the present. They knew how to encourage people to tell stories, to create pictures and to tune into body reactions from the past that had been stimulated by the terrifying events in the present. The New Mexico therapists told me how, depending on each client's unique fears and physical reactions, they were able to show their clients how to release the terrifying grip that habitual fear holds over mind, body, and relationship. Some people needed to be encouraged to breathe deeply while remembering some long-forgotten horror. Others needed to sob, to rage, to pace the room, to lie on the floor in numbed silence, to hold hands, to hug, to pray.

The realities of 9/11 were bad enough to have to experience as a current reality, but the human tendency to layer new realities on top of old unresolved past terrors was making life utterly unbearable for clients and therapists alike that week. An enlightened therapeutic approach had much release and relief to offer. *Processing old relationship fears in the context of a new understanding relationship allows us to break free of the hold they have on us.* The New Mexico conference room was electrified that

day as we shared our week's experiences and as therapists allowed themselves an opportunity to rage, to sigh, to sob, or to cringe in helpless fear. Who could imagine what might happen next?

What I had learned that week in my consulting room and that day with the New Mexico therapists had to be shared with others. I had to find a way to show people how our individual childhood patterns of fear live on in our minds and bodies ready at any moment to be reactivated in response to impacting experiences. And that our long-established fear reflexes are deeply enmeshed in our body-mind-relationship selves.

Clients I've worked with over the years had taught me about the many kinds of early relational experiences that children find overwhelming. Body workers and health professionals who specialize in locating and releasing body tensions had taught me how to tune into our moment-by-moment body experiences. The New Mexico therapists made clear to me how we can put those hangover fear reflexes into stories, pictures, memories, and body sensations that can be emotionally re-experienced in a present

intimate relationship. They clarified for me the interpersonal process required to free ourselves from the paralyzing effects of longstanding patterns of mental anguish and physical pain. That is, long-standing fears can be encouraged to re-emerge in an empathic intimate relationship setting. When two emotionally involved people experience together long-suppressed trauma there is hope of at last finding ways to release the grip that fear has over our body-mind-relationship connections.

When Breta and I got together the week after 9/11, we re-experienced the frightening fire that affected us both when she was three years old, a frightening car accident that we were involved in when she was seven, and a number of other frightening circumstances from both of our lives. Her mother and I had separated just before Breta turned three. Judy and I had both maintained a close parenting relationship with Breta throughout her growing up years so that sharing emotional experiences together had always been a part of our lives. Breta and I certainly

found that sharing our 9/11 experiences and all that it brought up for us to be both integrating, relieving, and freeing.

Chapter Two:

Mapping the Seven Deadly Fears in Your BMR

Connection

My experiences with Breta on 9/11 illustrate what we already know about fear—that it is a body-mind-relationship experience. Connecting to our deepest selves becomes a matter of locating our body-mind-relationship connections. For convenience, a new term emerges, the BMR connection (pronounced “Beam-er”). I will use the term BMR connection to designate that central place in our selves where body, mind, and relationship are one. Once you get used to thinking in terms of your BMR connections you will find the term a very useful shorthand.

If we want to understand the impact that our fear reflexes have on us, it helps to have a general map of the kinds of fears that are common to all people. The Seven Deadly Fears arise from seven kinds of complex relationship challenges that we all had to contend with in the course of growing up. There are, of course, many

specific things that we are each individually afraid of. But the seven relationship challenges considered in this book organize and give rise to relational fears that are common to all people. Using an understanding of the universal Seven Deadly Fears you can begin mapping your own body-mind-relationship experiences and specifying how they are unique to you.

Most of us have lived a lifetime with low-grade daily tensions of various kinds that continue to sap our energy and to limit our relational flexibility. Learning to contact and then to release our fear reflexes is finally a matter of slowly pushing ourselves into painful areas of background tension—first in our bodies and then into the distressing words, images, stories, and body sensations that emerge from our BMR connection. I will shortly give you a series of stories to illustrate how we can learn to identify fear reflexes in our BMR connections and then to find ways of liberating ourselves from it.

Since human fear reflexes are not developed in the jungle as with most mammals, but rather in the confines of intimate human

relationships, our habitual fear reflexes can best be re-experienced in actual here-and-now intimate human relationships. True there are terrifying physical events that happen to us but as thinking and imaging human beings these fearful experiences are accessible to our consciousness through words, images, stories, and body sensations. Psychotherapies and body therapies of various kinds have been devised to do just that—to set up ongoing interpersonal exchanges in which fear reflexes can come into play and can be re-worked with a relationship partner.

Learning to let go of old patterns of body-mind-relationship constriction and then to develop new, more creative and energetic strategies for responding to current relational challenges is what therapy and body work are all about. In this sense any committed intimate relationship can become therapeutic. Two people committed to studying together their automatic mind and body reactions to each other can effectively locate past fear reflexes in their present relationship. You can, however, accomplish a great deal on your own by studying each of the Seven Deadly Fears

described in this book and working on a daily basis to make contact with your BMR connection. Further explanations and exercises are provided in the supplementary *Overcoming Relationship Fears Workbook*.

Next you will find a summary chart of the Seven Deadly Fears that can serve as a general map for considering your personal fear reflexes. You may find it helpful to study the summary chart for a moment now to get a sense of where we are going.

In Chapters Five and Six I will provide two exercises, “Putting on Your Aliveness Monitor” and “Touching Base with Your Body,” that can be practiced on a daily basis to aid you in contacting your personal fear reflexes in your BMR connection. In Chapter Eight I will consider each of the Seven Deadly Fears in the chart in detail.

But before we go too far let’s consider a story that illustrates how one contacts and releases fear in the BMR connection.

Summary Chart: The Seven Deadly Fears

1. **The Fear of Being Alone** We dread reaching out and finding nobody there to respond to our needs. We fear being ignored, being left alone, and being seen as unimportant. We feel the world does not respond to our needs. So what's the use?
2. **The Fear of Connecting** Because of frightening and painful experiences in the past, connecting emotionally and intimately with others feels dangerous. Our life experiences have left us feeling that the world is not a safe place. We fear injury so we withdraw from connections.
3. **The Fear of Being Abandoned** After having connected emotionally or bonded with someone, we fear being either abandoned with our own needs or being

swallowed up by the other person's. In either case we feel the world is not a dependable place; that we live in danger of emotional abandonment. We may become clingy and dependent or we may become super-independent—or both.

4. **The Fear of Self-Assertion** We have all experienced rejection and perhaps even punishment for expressing ourselves in a way that others don't like. We thus may learn to fear asserting ourselves and letting our needs be known in relationships. We feel the world does not allow us to be truly ourselves. We may either cease putting ourselves out there altogether, we may assert ourselves with a demanding vengeance, or we may even relate in passive-aggressive ways.

5. **The Fear of Lack of Recognition** When we do not get the acceptance and confirmation we need in relationships, we are left with a feeling of not being seen or recognized for who we really are. We may then fear we will not be affirmed or confirmed in our relationships. Or we may fear that others will only respect and love us if we are who they want us to be. We may work continuously to feel seen and recognized by others or we may give up in rage, humiliation or shame.

6. **The Fear of Failure and Success** When we have loved and lost or tried and failed, we may fear opening ourselves up to painful competitive experience again. When we have succeeded or won—possibly at

someone else's expense—we may experience guilt or fear retaliation. Thus we learn to hold back in love and life, thereby not risking either failure or success. We may feel the world does not allow us to be fulfilled. Or we may feel guilty and afraid for feeling fulfilled.

7. **The Fear of Being Fully Alive** Our expansiveness, creative energy and joy in our aliveness inevitably come into conflict with demands from family, work, religion, culture, and society. We come to believe that we must curtail our aliveness in order to be able to conform to the demands and expectations of the world we live in. We feel the world does not permit us to be fully, joyfully, and passionately alive. Rather than putting our whole selves out there with full

energy and aliveness, we may throw in the towel, succumb to mediocre conformity, or fall into a living deadness.

Chapter Three

Dave Fights His Way Out of Fear

Dave lay down on the couch in my office. Yes, we psychoanalysts sometimes still use the old-fashioned Freudian couch! You know, the ones you see in cartoons with the client lying down and the analyst sitting behind, notepad in hand? I have found that use of the couch works well when someone is trying to get inside themselves very deeply.

“I have something really neurotic to talk about today!” Dave began humorously. What unfolded was an exasperating story about buying a new car, a story that might have happened to any of us. But Dave was intent on getting me to understand something beyond the mere outlines of the story—though he himself was not quite sure what it was he needed to express today.

Dave explained that he was with his wife, Naomi, last Tuesday on the way home for dinner when they decided to stop at a nearby car dealer—just to look. They had been considering a new car for

some time and had a pretty good idea what they wanted, but they both dreaded the process of actually buying something. Naomi was feeling impatient and, as always, very distrustful of car salesmen. The dance of models, features, accessories, prices, and trade-in allowance began and soon they were shuffled to the next man in the sales hierarchy where they were ushered into a private office as credit reports were called for and inspection of their old vehicle quickly got under way. Then the bargaining, the consulting with the yet higher-up sales manager, the back-and-forth offers, the whispers in the corridor, then yes, then no, that's too much, that's not enough, until finally Dave asked, "you mean you're going to let me walk out of here for a measly \$500!?" "Yes."

Dave quickly explained to me that he got the car—and the last \$500 off too. But the hour-long harangue had been excruciating, humiliating, intimidating, and exasperating. Dave and his wife walked out to their new car completely spent from the ordeal. Naomi had been giving Dave angry, impatient "let's go" looks the

whole while, but in the end she was impressed with his tenacity and victory.

But it hadn't felt like a victory to Dave—rather, it felt like a complete defeat. He had been shaking the whole time, enraged at the way he was being treated, the rudeness and the bullying—“it's a wonder people buy new cars!”

“What was it that made the experience so unbearable?” I asked.

“I'm not sure, but the story isn't over yet!”

Several days later when the manufacturer sent Dave the form to evaluate the sale, he lambasted the dealership and the sales force for the way they had roughed him up. Soon, of course, he received an apologetic phone call from the sales manager inquiring about what had been so bad. Dave experienced another raging episode on the telephone followed by the promise of a gift accessory of his choice to make up for the bad treatment he had received. Dave had a hard time even re-entering the dealership to select his “free gift,” but he stopped by and chose a leather gearshift handle, which was to be shipped to him shortly. Yesterday he had received his

compensatory gift—the “same cheap crappy plastic handle” that was already in the car, not the promised leather upgrade.

Dave regaled me with fantasies of going back to the dealership, stomping in, blowing up, ranting and raving, screaming and waving his arms at everyone, really embarrassing them, getting back at them for their rude treatment of him, teaching them a lesson, and making them regret they had treated him so badly. As these rageful fantasies emerged Dave understood that more was going on for him than just the car and the gearshift handle, so he decided to wait and go over the whole episode with me before actually doing anything.

“What exactly is it you want to do?” I asked.

“I want to punch that guy’s lights out—that’s what I want to do.”

“For humiliating you?”

“Yes, for degrading me, for making me feel like a fool, making me feel like an idiot! With all those years of being told I was an

idiot, being frightened and humiliated and made to feel like a fool—I don't need this anymore!"

"So it's the life-long helplessness of it all?"

"Absolutely! But I'm not helpless any more. I'm going to make those guys grovel! I'll get even with them—I will! They're gonna pay!"

"You'll *make* them understand."

"I will. I swear I will!"

Dave lapsed into meditative silence. Then slowly, "there's no way they are ever going to understand. No matter what I do, I know they won't get it. They never have, they never will. They are fixed in their own ways, hell-bent on degrading and humiliating me until I finally submit. And I always have. I always submit."

"This is true helplessness, no choice but to submit to their abuses."

(Silence...) "I have to do something. But what can I do?"

"You've already determined it will do no good."

“No. It won’t.” Tears began to trickle down Dave’s face.
“There—the one thing I’m never supposed to do, cry. Are you happy? You made me cry.”

“I have the image of a small child, perhaps an infant in a crib, needing something—desperately trying to communicate his plight and his caregivers unable or unwilling to respond—forcing the child into rage. When the rage is spent the kid collapses into helpless capitulation. And somewhere in there is an accumulation of abuse and enough fear of further abuse to block even the tears.”

(Calming...slowing...) “The whole time I’ve been lying here telling you this, my feet and legs, arms and hands, fists, have been twitching.”

“Your body wants to rage, to flail, to kick and scream bloody murder but something blocks your expression, blocks your full experiencing. You are completely locked up.”

“My jaw is tight too—you know I grind my teeth in my sleep?”

“You want to bite.”

“Do I ever!”

“So you’re sure it will do no good to go to the dealership.”

“I know. But I’m going anyway. I have to. I can’t live like this.”

“The problem isn’t at the dealership.”

“I know.”

“It’s in your feet and legs, your arms and fists, your jaw.”

“Don’t forget my throat, oh my throat—it’s so tight it hurts.”

“And your lungs?”

“Yes, my chest is tight too. I can hardly breathe” (Then humorously, but with more tears.) “You’re making me cry again. You know that I’m never supposed to cry. How could you do this to me?”

“It’s about time you had a good long cry—a deep sobbing for all those years of holding their humiliating attacks and their complete lack of understanding inside. It’s time to let the tears roll for all those forced humiliations and capitulations.”

Dave and I talked about how our earliest memories cannot be stored like video-recorded pictures but are stored in muscle

constrictions and emotional expectations that crop up in our day-to-day relationships. We tighten, we tense, and soon we feel the stress, the pain, and the depressed exhaustion that comes from holding ourselves so tightly until we finally collapse. The reprimands and punishments we received as children for wanting things and expressing our feelings forced us—out of fear—to comply with our parents' demands and expectations. The memory of all of those capitulations, the shaming, the humiliation lives on in our body-minds—not simply in the mental pictures we call memories but in our many physical fear reflexes.

Dave felt tightness and twitching because his body wanted to rage, to kick, to scream, to wail. But the living memories of his abusive parents inside possessed him and forbade his expressions—and even prevented his full experiencing of himself. He tightened his muscles and constricted his expressions until he shook all over and finally fell into exhaustion—wanting to strike out, wanting to bite, wanting to scream, wanting to cry—but no longer able to.

As we talked quietly about how this all happens in childhood, Dave spontaneously recalled several humiliating scenes from the past when he felt this same way at the hands of his parents, older siblings, school teachers, and friends. Dave's tears slowly subsided and I saw his body begin to relax and his breathing gradually deepen. Allowing himself a full measure of feeling with me, while simultaneously permitting images and bodily sensations from the past to emerge into our relationship slowly released the grip of fear.

That night in therapy group Dave received humorous sympathy from group members for being forced by his therapist to go places he didn't want to go, for being forced into remembering things that he has tried his best to forget, for being coerced by his therapist into crying when he didn't want to cry. They all knew how bad it could be. As Dave recounted his car buying story and the memories that emerged in his therapy session one woman empathized, "no wonder you took to self-soothing. Why wouldn't you become addicted to fantasizing and taking care of yourself—

nobody else was going to!” Teary eyed, Dave declared that he just really doesn’t like this therapy process at all—it’s too painful, too much suffering!

Everyone in group understood. It is painful to locate the places in our body-minds and relationships where we carry the fear reflexes of our childhood. It’s horrible to revisit and to experience again the painful constrictions that we hold onto so tightly in our bodies. But what a relief it is at last to experience those fear constrictions releasing—to at last break the bondage of our fear reflexes! “There’s no going back now, I said.”

Chapter Four

Fear in the BMR Connection—Destructive Hangovers from the Past

Dave's story makes clear how childhood reactions to fear can persist and color our everyday lives—usually without our even being aware of it. Fear reflexes from the past silently impact how we experience significant events and relationships in the present. It would be wonderful to think that perfect childhoods and completely functional families are a reality that we have all experienced, and that fear is not a part of everyone's upbringing. But it simply isn't so.

From infancy through our formative years we have all developed personal reactions to numerous disturbing and frightening relationship situations. As the twig is bent, so grows the tree. We are creatures of habit and, whether we want to think so or not, we carry the emotional bends and twists of childhood fears into later body-mind-relationship experiences.

Very early in life we are taught, “Don't be afraid—you're over-reacting!” “Act grown up—deal with it!” “Settle down and be more lady-like.” “Big boys don't cry.” We soon learn to suppress not only our expressions of helplessness and fear, but even our awareness of most of our fears.

But, even worse, when we are no longer conscious of our fear reflexes, we are unable to distinguish clearly between real dangers that exist in the present and habitual responses living on from the past. Furthermore, fear reflexes established in early childhood work automatically and outside of our awareness—often to our detriment.

We may ask ourselves why we experience certain persistent tensions and pains in our bodies when there is no apparent physical reason. It seldom occurs to us that these discomforts are indications of suppressed fear reflexes constricting our body tissues in painful and unhealthy ways.

We may wonder why we keep having the same basic problems though they come up differently in different relationships. It may

not occur to us that we are habitually afraid in intimate relationships and that our recurrent fear is essentially an unconscious body reflex from the past that thwarts us in our attempts to relate more spontaneously and realistically in the present.

How often have we said to ourselves, “This is nothing to be so stressed out about—what’s up with me, anyway?” If we had stopped for a moment and let our body-mind-relationship self relax and breathe a little, we might have a flash of insight from some previous painful or frightening situation— perhaps even from our growing up years. By pausing and allowing ourselves to experience what is going on deep in our BMR connection we might gain some insight into what is happening to us now and how something in the present is triggering a fear reflex based on something that has happened to us in the past.

Furthermore, our fear reflexes—originally developed for self-protection—often actually work against us by doing our thinking for us. For example, fear reflexes may automatically signal danger

when there is none realistically operating in the present moment. I am thinking of how easy it is for people with abusive backgrounds to experience a well-intended criticism as some sort of malicious attack. Or conversely, a how a fear reflex may erroneously focus us on some internal concern or physical symptom while causing us to miss completely some real external threat or danger! For example, a business person may be so obsessed with keeping the details of the business running just right (so that he doesn't get punished or humiliated) that huge shifts in marketing and sales demands get entirely overlooked.

Fear reflexes often operate more or less continuously at a subliminal level—having an ongoing tensing or dampening effect on our overall spirits and performance levels without our even being aware of what is happening.

But beyond the well understood body-mind connection, the stories already told here demonstrate that body-mind fear reflexes are dynamically connected to our relationships—past and present.

We know that we experience tension, nervousness, and stress at times, but we tend not to have a clue as to their underlying relationship origins. Nor are we conscious of the price we are paying in the present—mentally, physically or relationally—for allowing these fear reflexes to continue unchecked. We move on as though everything were okay with us and our relationships when, if truth be known, it is not.

The ideas and experiences provided in this book can help you identify your personal patterns of fear reflexes. You can begin noticing when and how fear reflexes operate in your daily relational life. In learning to allow sensations, words, and images to express relational fear reflexes from the past as they live on in the present you can learn to break free of their limiting power. You can learn to reduce significantly the mental and physical stresses caused by fear reflexes. You can enjoy your creative energies that allow you to be more fully alive!

The next two chapters describe two exercises that you can do on a daily basis to help you make contact with your BMR

connection. Later as we consider the Seven Deadly Fears I will refer back to these consciousness-raising exercises as ways of identifying and releasing your particular fear reflexes.

Chapter Five

Experience Your BMR Connection: Putting On Your Aliveness Monitor

Cardiologists have people wear heart monitors for days at a time to study heart irregularities. The person is instructed to push a button whenever an unusual sensation occurs so that the activity of the heart can be electronically recorded. The monitor is then taken to a laboratory for analysis. This close monitoring under a wide variety of circumstances can help doctors prescribe more effective treatment.

For the purpose of learning how fear operates in your BMR connection, imagine that you have a featherweight “Aliveness Monitor” which you put on every morning. It is like a close-fitting body glove that you slip into right after your morning shower. It fits almost invisibly and leaves your body in a quite free and comfortable state. Your Aliveness Monitor has a fine network of microscopic electronic probes and sensors that monitors all parts of

your body—both separately and in relationship to each other throughout the day. It is truly a miraculous system.

The moment your breathing slows or quickens, that activity is relayed to the Aliveness Monitor. This data is cataloged alongside the accompanying reactions of increased adrenalin in your blood, an acceleration in your heart rate, a dilation of your eyes, and a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach. The tightening of your diaphragm muscle is monitored along with the crimping in your toes, the tension in your jaw, and the slight tremor in your nostrils. Further, this twenty-first century technological wonder is capable of creating a detailed computerized video picture of you and all of the activities you are engaging in during the day.

With your Aliveness Monitor in place you can study exactly (1) how your fear reflex appeared, (2) how long each fear reaction was maintained, and (3) how the fear constriction was slowly released or how long it was tenaciously held on to.

The good news is that you don't have to wait for twenty-first century technology to provide you with your Aliveness Monitor!

You already possess in your bodies an extraordinarily complex network of built-in micro-electronic probes and sensors, which you can program to do an incredibly effective job of informing you of the exact nature and pattern of your fear responses! Once you learn how to fully employ this system for your own benefit you can gain power over your habitual fear reflexes and find ways of reprogramming yourself. Put simply, you have everything you need to begin observing and releasing your fear reflexes.

Biofeedback machines operate successfully in clinics all over the world. Their results demonstrate beyond doubt that we have the power at our disposal to notice and to alter life-threatening constrictions in every part of our bodies. Healers from all cultures throughout the ages have been telling us this, but we have only recently begun to listen.

You can keep your mind and body healthy by cultivating a heightened consciousness of your relationship fears as tensions arise in various places of your body in the course of the day. Your own built-in Aliveness Monitor can give you ongoing information

about the state of your BMR connection, allowing you then to work on stretching, breathing, imaging, and releasing your fear reflexes as they come up for you. The next exercise will take you even farther toward discovering ways of releasing your fear reflexes once you have identified them and have a beginning sense of where they are coming from and what they may mean in your BMR connection.

Chapter Six

Experience Your BMR Connection: Touching Base with Your Body

The following set of exercises provides a way to “touch base” with all parts of your body. Try doing this exercise when you first get up in the morning. Whatever else you may do in the way of physical activity during the day, this beginning will connect you to your body and your breathing, and help alert you to where you are holding your tension. You can also “touch base” with your body at other times—like before and after stressful meetings and events, and at the close of a trying day.

We all carry our tension in various parts of our bodies and different relationship situations stimulate different patterns of fear reflexes. Some people experience chest or abdominal pain, other people experience headaches, tight jaws, back pain, joint pains, asthma attacks, or muscle spasms. It could be your eyes, your

throat, your knees, or feet—the possibilities cover all parts of our bodies.

The purpose in each of the following exercises is to stretch very slowly into various areas of your body while monitoring sensations that may give you clues to where tensions are being held at the moment. You will notice that your tensions are different at different time during the day and on different days. In monitoring shifts in sensation, you are concentrating your attention on tight or sluggish movements. Over time, the process of actual movement and stretching in these exercises becomes almost second nature and you will find that various images and memories will spontaneously emerge to guide you into various relationship challenges—past, present, and future. Recall my experience while swimming laps and suddenly noticing that various knots in different places in my body were related to problems I was currently experiencing in several troubling relationships.

Touching base with your body involves five slow and simple exercises to nurture close contact with your body-mind-

relationship self whenever you feel you need it. Obtaining this satisfying kind of genuine self-contact and re-vitalization obviously has major advantages over common substitutes such as habitual use of caffeine, sugar, salt, soda, and other stimulating snacks and addictive activities.

Touching Base with Your Body¹

1. Breathe and Reach:

Plant your feet apart about shoulder width and bend your knees slightly. As you slowly and deeply inhale, slowly bring your arms out in front of you and then raise them up over your head, stretching upward and reaching as far as possible without straining until you are almost up on your toes. On the exhale open your arms out sideways and slowly bring them down to your side.

¹ Thanks to Virginia Wink Hilton for suggesting this very helpful set of exercises.

Repeat these breathing and reaching movements slowly three times, deeply inhaling and slowly exhaling while stretching your arms to the maximum before relaxing them at your sides.

Take several long, deep breaths between each repetition.

Be mindful of all parts of your body as it stretches and relaxes. Monitor carefully how your arms, hands, and fingers feel. What do you notice in your shoulders, chest, abdomen, and back? Feel your pelvic joint, your thighs, ankles, feet, and toes. Note wherever there are tensions or sluggish areas and try stretching a little bit into those areas. While stretching, see what sensations, words and images may be ready to emerge from your BMR connection.

2. Open Your Chest and Release Your Shoulders:

To further open your chest and deepen your breathing, while standing bend your elbows up next to your side. Then thrust your elbows backward, one at a time, as though you were pushing something or someone behind you away. It may help if you open your throat and your chest and say forcefully or even yell out as

you thrust, “Get off my back!” Remember that your goal here is to monitor very carefully exactly what you are experiencing in your BMR connection while you are going through the stretches.

Repeat three times alternating from side to side, or as much as you want to in order to release constrictions in your chest and shoulders.

Then thrust your arms out in front of you, the palms of your hands facing outward, as if you were forcefully pushing someone or something away. Say forcefully or shout “Go away!” or “No!”

Repeat three times, or as many times as you want to. Experience any reluctance to pushing things out of your way.

Take a moment to relax. Take a deep breath, let your arms dangle loosely, slightly bend your knees. Shake yourself a bit to loosen up.

Now lean forward slightly and swing your arms from side to side, parallel, in an easy, soothing motion. As you move from side to side, shift your weight from one foot to the other. Feel your body's freedom!

Again, as you stretch, note any tense or sluggish areas and stretch into those areas. While stretching always be on the lookout for sensations, words and images that may arise from your BMR connection.

3. Release Your Lower Back and Pelvis:

Place your hands on your hips and move your hips in an easy, wide circle—forward, to the right, back, left, and forward again. Move very slowly. Allow your upper body to move in the opposite direction of your hips in a counter-balance. Circle three times in one direction. Then reverse and make three circles moving your hips in the opposite direction. Stretch and be mindful of every muscle as you go—your back muscles, your hips and thighs, your arms and shoulders and your innards. What came up for you? Remember the purpose of the movement is to alert you to places that are not fluid and comfortable so that you can monitor your BMR connection for what's happening to you in your present life.

Now stand with your knees slightly bent. On the inhale, retract your pelvis as far back as you can comfortably go. Then on the exhale, thrust your pelvis forward. Do this three or more times. Make a strong sound as you thrust your pelvis forward, “Huh!, Huh!” Our pelvis bone is designed to swing forward and backward easily like a hinge, but life's tensions cause a freezing of natural vitality at the base of our spines. Over time retracting and thrusting often restores our natural energy by increasing circulation and relieving tensions in our lower back and pelvic areas. Allow your whole body to get into the retracting and thrusting.

Notice any tensions or sluggish muscles and gently stretch yourself into these areas while watching for sensations, words and images that may arrive from your BMR connection. For example, the first time I tried this exercise I experienced repeated childhood admonishments from parents and teachers echoing in my ear to “sit up straight,” “pull your stomach in,” “thrust your chest out”—all instructions I now realize that aim toward making the body more

rigid (and unhealthy) rather than softer, more pliable, vibrant, and healthy.

4. Ground Your Legs and Feet:

Plant your feet apart about shoulder width and bend your knees slightly. Slowly shift your weight onto your right leg so that your entire torso is aligned directly over that leg. Slowly turn your right knee slightly outward. Exhaling, slowly bend your right knee, pressing your foot into the floor as you do. Then slowly straighten your leg while inhaling. Slowly repeat this movement five or six more times. Listen to your body, monitor for tightness and pain that will alert you to what's happening in your BMR connection.

Now shift your weight to your left leg. Turn your left knee out while exhaling and slowly bend your left knee and press your foot into the floor. Repeat five or six times.

While doing this exercise be mindful of every muscle in your legs and feel the tension release as you breathe and stretch. Notice the total body realignment this exercise promotes and the rich

possibilities here for further release as you stretch, focus and breathe. Don't be afraid to vocalize however you like—our voice muscles need release too!

Next, bend over forward as far as you comfortably can. Ideally in time you will come to touch all ten fingers lightly to the floor for balance. You can bend your knees as much as you need to but keep your weight on your legs not your hands. While in this grounded position inhale and exhale deeply three times or more. Be mindful of the stretch and the deep muscle release. You may wish to shake your whole upper body, head, and arms like a gunnysack to loosen up. Allow yourself a little time while all the muscles slowly stretch out. While holding the stretch your legs and pelvis may start to vibrate—treasure this! Your full body energy is alive and pulsing freely!

When you come back to a standing position, uncurl slowly, allowing your head to remain forward and down and your neck to stay entirely relaxed. As you slowly come up think of stacking one at a time the bones of your spine from bottom to top as you uncurl

upward. When you are in an upright position, bring your head up last. Go very slowly and be mindful of every slight movement—monitor body sensations in your feet, legs, hips, arms, shoulders, head and each area of your spine and neck as your position slowly changes.

As always, stretch into any tense or sluggish areas while inviting sensations, words and images that may be arising from your BMR connection.

5. Breathe and Reach Again:

Finally, repeat the first “Breathing and Reaching” exercise above to open up your chest and lungs as fully as possible. When you have finished, say this affirmation: “I want to live this day Fully Alive!”

Say it again or yell out with joy and determination.

“I WANT TO BE FULLY ALIVE!!!!”

“I WANT TO BE FULLY ALIVE!!!!”

You may also feel like “jumping for joy!” Try it, jump up and yell, “yeah, yeAH, YEAAAHH!” You’ll soon actually begin to feel joyful!

In your journey toward greater aliveness—

You are now sporting your new invisible Aliveness Monitor.

- You are continuously monitoring fear indicators in all parts of your body throughout the day.
- You are frequently “Touching Base with Your Body” and stretching into tense and sluggish areas.
- While stretching you are tuning into sensations, words and images that express your BMR connection.
- In your quest for greater aliveness you are releasing your habitual fear constrictions as you go, thereby reprogramming your Seven Deadly Fear reflexes.

Dare to be Fully Alive!

Chapter Seven

I Dreamed of Being Scared to Death

This next story illustrates contacting and releasing fears in the BMR connection and is more personal. My friend Gayle Trenberth and I sat across from each other at the end of a long table with nine other therapists at Bahía Mexican Restaurant for a Sunday lunch break. I was teaching my day-long continuing education course on law and ethics in psychotherapy in my office across the street. The day before, I had taught the same course to a ballroom full of therapists at a large San Diego hotel. The week before, I had taught the same course to a packed conference room at the American Psychological Association Convention in Honolulu.

I was telling Gayle over tortillas and ceviche how different the physical experience of teaching was today—simply being with a few colleagues I have known for years in my own familiar office surroundings—versus yesterday and last week with large groups of strangers in large anonymous hotel conference rooms.

Rambling on, I told Gayle that I had taught classes for so many years that I no longer experienced nervousness before or during lectures in front of large audiences. And that I had taught this particular state-required law and ethics course for therapists so many times I could do it blindfolded. It seemed I was able to do this time and again because my teaching style, no matter how large the group, was to engage the participants in discussion throughout the day so that the course remained interesting, alive and different for me each time. But still, even with all of my experience, I usually felt pretty beat-up after large, impersonal day-long required courses—for no particular reason I could identify. At the end of the day I experienced tension and pain in my upper neck and lower back. My vocal cords also felt unnecessarily strained.

I had decided that this particular weekend would be a good opportunity for self-observation since there would be a sharp contrast between the large anonymous crowd of captive therapists on Saturday and the small group of intimate colleagues for the same course in my own familiar surroundings on Sunday.

Gayle, an experienced body psychotherapist, casually remarked, “I suppose it depends on what one’s history of being attacked is.” Immediately something deep stirred inside me. With hindsight I realize that Gayle knows me better, reads my body much better, than I do myself! Gayle continued, “Maybe if on those large occasions you could spend your lunch hour in your hotel room....”

Interrupting her, I said that I had decided to do just that yesterday, to have my Salmon Caesar in my room, and that it did indeed help to do grounding and stretching exercises mid-day.

Gayle continued, “During lunches try lying down on the floor of your hotel room or on the bed and just close your eyes and see what words and pictures come up—you know, mindfulness?...the ole dredging up words and images for those tense body states...?”

“Gayle, Du...uuh!” I said. “Of course! The obvious thing—why haven’t I thought of that before? That’s exactly the way to study these painful body tensions!” I assured her that I would try it next time for sure. We both laughed at human folly and at the

blind nature of unconscious blocks. I thanked Gayle as we left Bahía to return to class and said that I would report the results of my body meditations back to her soon.

That night I dreamed:

I was with someone in what seemed like the basement of a large house, not unlike the house I grew up in. We were walking around the old furnace that had large arm-like ducts reaching out into all parts of the house. It seemed like it had once been coal burning and then converted to gas, like ours had been after the Second World War when I was a young child. I suddenly noticed the latch on the door and exclaimed, “Look, it’s been locked from inside, whoever it is must have closed and latched the door from inside!” Horror began to mount as we rushed around to the other side of the furnace, realizing that someone inside had been asphyxiated or burned alive.

I quickly lowered the release lever on the escape hatch, the one where ashes and debris are removed. It came

crashing open and on a rack that unfolded was the charred body of a child—face down with lower back and upper neck stretched forward—a boy or girl about 7 or 8.

In a dream warp backwards in time I was suddenly transported upstairs where I could hear echoing through the entire house the earlier screams of the child trapped in the furnace—at first slow, low and pleading, “Daddy!...Daddy!...Daaddy!” Then, with growing intensity and realization of the danger, the screams became more and more frantic and panic-stricken—rising in pitch finally to heart-rending shrieks, “DADDY, DAADDY, DAAADDY!!!”

I could hear the desperate child calling with escalating panic and terror—but in the dream as the Daddy I was paralyzed, powerless to do anything to help. At last the wild shrieking fell silent and I awoke sweating and terrified—with my throat straining and the realization that I was that burnt child who had been pleading and shrieking

bloody murder in the dream! It was I who had died as a child screaming for my beloved Daddy of early childhood to hear my abandoned distress! I was pleading for relief from the cruel pain of his later abuse!

In the dream I am accompanied by the “someone” who is often present in dreams when one is in therapy or in an intimate relationship—here apparently Gayle whom I had agreed to report to—or my own internal therapist-self. For the first time in my life I experienced compassion for my father, realizing that he (like my paralyzed self in the dream) had indeed heard the distress of my dying child-self under his monstrously cruel abuses, but that he felt powerless to stop the torture being inflicted. Who knows how many generations of violence he himself was victim to? Like a great stone savage he repeatedly tried to reassure himself, “Spare the rod and spoil the child.”

The dream suggests that I have remained in a terror trap that I somehow locked myself into as a child. And that my inner child-self, anticipating that I will be a helpless, passive victim of

irrational attack, has created an ongoing form of living death. Painful scenes from a lifetime of relationship disappointments and injuries suddenly flash before my eyes. I see a distinct pattern of fear reflexes at work—constricting my upper neck, my lower back, and my throat.

In a flash I suddenly realized that in teaching state-required classes to large groups of “captive” therapists, I had come to anticipate being the passive and helpless victim of irrational resentment and attack. No wonder my body-mind-relationship self had been up-tight and in pain with my throat tense at the end of the day!

For a lifetime my scared-to-death inner child has been silently pleading for release from this terrifying self-generated prison-house but I haven’t known how to get relief. Gayle’s empathic suggestion that I consider my history of being attacked stimulated the dream story, the pictures and the body sensations required to allow me to focus on the BMR connection that had been painfully constricting my throat, my neck and my lower back for years. My

stretching into the tension pains the day before had successfully focused my attention on the offending tissues and Gayle's suggestion had stimulated the dream pictures and story that pointed the way to relief.

By way of follow-up, I can say that on long teaching days I now regularly retreat to my hotel room for breaks and lunch—allowing myself some voice rest and BMR connection. I Put on My Aliveness Monitor and I go through the Touching Base with My Body stretching exercises slowly, pushing myself into areas of tension or pain. The body monitoring and gentle stretching allow me to identify and release the building tensions of the day. By the end of teaching days I now find myself relaxed and exhilarated rather than exhausted and tense. So I can and do practice what I preach!

Chapter Eight

Considering the Seven Deadly Fears

We will next consider in detail each of the Seven Deadly Fears in order of their increasing relational complexity. That is, in the course of growing up, children experience the most basic human fears first, while the more complex relational fears are learned later. But it is not uncommon for later more complex relational fears to become layered on top of earlier more basic fears, so that the Seven Deadly Fears appear in a variety of personal combinations.

1. The Fear of Being Alone

We dread reaching out and finding nobody there to respond to our needs. We fear being ignored, being left alone, and being seen as unimportant. We feel the world does not respond to our needs. So what's the use?

A Story to Illustrate the Fear of Being Alone

Petra arrives fifteen minutes early at Starbuck's Coffee for her meeting with Ivan. She locates a table in a quiet corner, glances quickly at her watch then at the newspaper headlines. Out of the corner of her eye she can see some of the bakery selections and the Latte menu. She'll probably just have a Grande with a little Splenda. Earlier that morning, Petra had carefully selected her outfit and makeup because this meeting could turn out to be an important one. Ivan, who works in another branch of her company, had introduced himself at a sales meeting last Friday and had asked her to meet for coffee today. The meeting was ostensibly to exchange some sales leads, but it seems to Petra it could turn into something more.

Five minutes passes by and Petra feels her excitement building—Ivan is a really good-looking guy. She has noticed him from afar a few times before, but now she would get to experience him at close range. Five more minutes pass. He'll probably be here any time now, she tells herself. During their brief chat at the

meeting he had seemed really nice. No ring, so he's probably single she muses. Three o'clock arrives. Petra checks her cell phone again to be sure she hasn't missed any messages. Her stomach growls. She wonders if they still had any lemon chiffon cake left—her favorite. As a few more minutes pass Petra becomes aware that she has caught the attention of several young people working behind the counter. They'd surely noticed that she'd been here 20 minutes waiting by herself. Disheartened, after a few more minutes Petra gets up to order her Grande. There is no lemon chiffon cake left, only a selection of large cookies and a few morning muffins. She'd be okay with just coffee. "Leave room for cream, mam?" "No thanks, just coffee." She considers taking one of the overstuffed lounge chairs by the coffee table, but that seemed a bit informal.

Scanning the street for signs of Ivan, his brisk walk and winning smile, Petra slowly sips her Guatemala roast with Splenda. By now she finds herself nervously fingering her cup and shifting her napkin about on the table. At ten after, that sinking

feeling in the pit of her stomach slowly begins again. She should have gotten one of those cookies after all. By a quarter after three Petra feels weak all over. Her excitement and racing thoughts have given way to depletion, a slumping feeling inside, an emptiness, a weariness. He must have gotten delayed, she tells herself. Or did he forget? Maybe he thought better about meeting her and decided not to show. Petra's sinking feeling causes her to flash on a bout of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome she had experienced a few years ago. The feelings in her body recalled the exhaustion she had felt for weeks. "It's so often this way," she reflects. "I get my hopes up, I do my best to reach out, but in the end nothing ever works out." She's had her share of nice flings, to be sure, but right now she feels like Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*—nothing to do and no one to be with. What's the use of even trying? Defeated again, Petra quietly slips out of Starbuck's and makes her way home to her lonely apartment.

Do I have to go on? We all know how discouraging it can be to make an attempt at relating only to find ourselves stood up,

disheartened, discouraged and depressed, without the connection we had hoped for. We all know the pain of feeling left alone—of going out on a limb and then feeling un-responded to and unsupported. The fear of being alone is our deepest fear reflex and it comes up often in various subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

How the Fear of Being Alone Forms in Early Childhood

When as infants we reached out to those who loved us and found ourselves unresponded to, we lost heart. We lost our motivation for ever reaching in that same way again. We came to believe that there was nobody there to receive us or to interact rewardingly with us. So we gave up trying, gave up our efforts to seek emotional contact.

Since reaching out emotionally to others is expanding, and expanding is moving toward greater activity and aliveness, when we are frustrated in our efforts as infants we quickly learn that feeling more alive can be dangerous. Our experiences with failed attempts to reach our loved ones emotionally teaches us that the

more we expand, the more we reach out for connection, the more we are likely to experience the pain of how alone we really are. The greater our disappointments, the more we realize how inadequate our efforts are to get others to be present for us in the ways we need or hope for.

The instinctive fear in infancy is that when we are left alone we may literally wither and die. So as infants we put up a loud protest which in time turns into rage. When rage also fails to bring satisfaction to our needs we slump into hopelessness and despair. We saw this illustrated in Dave's car-buying story earlier when he knew that raging at the salespeople wouldn't work but he had no idea what else to do. Better to have few or no needs than to risk facing the agonizing possibility that there's nobody there. And so we learn to protect ourselves from disappointment, fear, and even our own rage, by minimizing what we ask for.

The bottom line on the fear of being alone is that as infants our instincts told us that we could not survive alone. In our infancy that was true. That was our reality then. But once this fear reflex

leading to collapse becomes established in our mental and physical attitudes, it repeatedly crops up to spoil later relationship situations—until and unless we learn how to move beyond the fear of being alone.

We dread reaching out and finding nobody there to respond to our needs. We fear being ignored, being left alone, and being seen as unimportant. We may feel, “what’s the use?” Best simply wither and retreat, feigning disinterest or a lack of enthusiasm. “Reaching out, going all out when there’s no promise of success, is just too much effort. It won’t work anyway,” we tell ourselves.

Some people cope with this fear by living a frenzied life-style—always doing things, going places, or being with people—whether those people are real, fantasized, fictional, internet or media people. In this way they can feel hyper-alive. In denial of their basic fear of being alone, such people are always on the run, doing, planning, and cooking up schemes to keep things alive and moving—never allowing themselves a minute of peace to relax, to contemplate, or to enjoy time alone. All of this activity certainly

wards off the terror of aloneness, but does not get them any closer to satisfying their deeper needs.

Making Contact with Your BMR Connection

Imagine you are eagerly anticipating getting together with someone you are intimately involved with. You are looking forward to some special one-on-one time together. As you read this scenario you may want to allow yourself to really feel, to notice where in your body you experience what's happening in your imagination.

So imagine anticipating getting together with someone special. Perhaps it's your spouse, your partner, your closest friend, your child, your beloved grandmother, or your therapist. As the time approaches you start feeling a bit fatigued and realize you're not quite as up for the get-together as you thought you would be. You have been overburdened lately, a lot on your mind. You are reminded that some of your old familiar physical complaints have been surfacing lately. You really want to get together with your

special person, to chat, to laugh, to play, to make love, or whatever you two enjoy doing best—but you’re feeling down and disappointed because your mood just isn’t right somehow.

The time arrives and you get together with your special person and do manage to muster enough energy to go forward, but your heart isn’t quite into it. Your relating partner senses it and maybe feels a little off too. You try to force more interest and enthusiasm, but you really can’t quite pull it off. You’re just not quite all here today.

After the encounter you wonder why things didn’t just pick you up more. Why, despite the fact that you really were looking forward to special time together, you weren’t feeling all that great so that relating seemed to be a little burdensome? This depressive, depleted feeling has happened to you before, but you’ve not quite been able to understand your sagging reluctance, your lackluster attitude at those times either. Maybe you need more sleep, you think. Maybe you ought to have your thyroid checked? Maybe

it's time for an anti-depressant, or something else to perk you up or give you a new lease on life?

On the surface this withering, slumping, weakening, disinterested, or withdrawing mental and physical experience doesn't look or feel like fear. But on closer examination it often turns out that a fear reflex is indeed involved—the long-held fear that if I reach out, assert myself, make an effort to connect, that it will do no good. The fear that in the end my efforts won't yield much and I will still find myself essentially alone. What's the use trying? You may know this isn't really the case with your special person, but the strong feeling is there anyway.

Bringing the Fear of Being Alone Reflex into Consciousness

The deep fear of being alone usually lies far from our conscious awareness because it started in infancy. The patterns of fear reflex associated with the very early and life-threatening terror of being all alone in the world (left to die) are usually embedded in our changing daily body states and in our anticipated and real

social interactions with people. So when we experience things like fatigue, physical symptoms, moods, posture pains, negative attitudes, frustrations and stress reactions, we are usually not even aware that it is, at bottom, a fear of being alone reflex that we are dealing with.

If we want to work on fear reflexes that are embedded in changing body states and social interactions we must make it a point to learn how to “monitor our aliveness”—our changing body states—on a moment-to-moment basis. And we must learn how to “touch base with our bodies” frequently during the day in order to see what physical sensations or tensions we are experiencing. Only when we can begin to allow sensations, words and images to emerge can we get clues as to what is going on with us. That is, we have to learn to listen to our bodies and learn to discern what fear reflexes are operating below the level of our awareness. In the fear of being alone reflex we have basically given up.

When I hear people repeatedly complaining about how bad the traffic is, how upsetting work is, how unpredictable the weather,

how tired they are, or how many symptoms get in the way of feeling good or doing well in life, I immediately think that this is a fear reflex from the earliest reaching out experiences. There are so many insurmountable obstacles, so many frustrating situations, so many demands, so many unrelenting physical concerns that the person simply cannot reach out and move effectively and efficiently into the world of vitalizing relationships.

As a therapist I hope to reflect this pattern of fear reflexes to my clients, often recurring self-defeating process. I do this first by continuing to highlight the “what’s the use” aspect in as many ways as possible, thus hoping to bring the sense of giving up or collapsing in the face of frustration and anticipated failure closer to consciousness.

Additionally, as I listen to the many frustrating or impossible situations a person is dealing with, I try to discern and give words to what the underlying fears might actually be in each situation. I may find myself saying to someone, “so when you figure your ideas really won’t be valued anyway, what’s the point in putting

them out there in the first place?” Or, “knowing that rejection from him is likely, best not even make yourself available.” Or, “no matter how hard you work to be an effective employee, with such a critical boss there’s really no point in even trying to satisfy her.” Or, “you’ve worked so hard on developing good friendships, but when they go sour so easily it seems better to just stay at home with your cat, your computer, and your TV.”

As you begin to get comfortable with “Putting on Your Aliveness Monitor” and “Touching Base with Your Body” throughout the day, keep alert to places in your body that seem to say, “what’s the use, anyway?” Then allow the sensations, words and images that come up for you to suggest what the fear of reaching out into the world of relationships may be about for you.

2. The Fear of Connecting

Because of frightening and painful experiences in the past, connecting emotionally and intimately with others feels dangerous. Our life experiences have left us feeling that

the world is not a safe place. We fear injury so we withdraw from connections.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Connecting is About

Horst and Lin fell in love at first sight and set up a blended family that felt ideal to both of them. Oh, to be sure, they experienced disagreements but they prided themselves on never going to bed angry with one another and on always being able to find a way to process their differences.

Recently, a custody battle with Lin's ex-husband further drew Horst and Lin together. Following this increased sense of closeness, Horst burst into tears in therapy one day telling me how much he loves Lin, how dependent he is on her and how horrible it would be if anything should ever happen to her.

The following night Horst has a dream of a tsunami wiping out everything where he and his family live, with him hopelessly searching in the rubble for his beloved wife and children. In the weeks that follow Horst is doubly horrified when sudden unbidden images of Lin being in a terrible accident begin flashing in his

mind while he is driving on the freeway. He is hesitant to even describe for me what he is seeing for fear it might come true. Lin might be burned in a great house fire. She might be killed in an earthquake. Their house might be struck by lightning and she be instantly killed. The entire family might be wiped out by the coming bird virus—so he needs to stock up on Gatorade. Horst considers the possibility that these flashes might be wishes to eliminate his deep sense of love and extreme dependency on Lin by eliminating her and the family—but no, that doesn't feel right.

A terrifyingly real dream awakens Horst—he is convinced that lightning has struck near his bed and in a panic he gets up to check things out. He remembers being terrified as a young child of burning in Hell for not being good enough.

As Horst's story unfolds it comes out that his mother was hospitalized repeatedly for months at a time for major depression throughout his early childhood. In his mind it was always because he wasn't being good enough, wasn't doing enough to help her. Time and again, just when he felt secure in his relationship with

her, she would suddenly disappear—sometimes with sirens and flashing red lights, maybe even blood. As the nature of his mother’s depression became clearer to Horst in therapy, he realized there must have been many times he was feeling close to mother when her illness once again abruptly ruptured the connection.

A lifetime of experiences began cascading into Horst’s consciousness. Time and again he would have done his best to connect with someone he loved when crash—and yet another relationship disaster would befall him. Now his deep abiding love for Lin and his secure and rewarding emotional dependency on her and the family has triggered a series of nightmares and fantasies of sudden disaster.

For Horst, any deep attachment meant that he would soon face a fragmenting calamity. How many times had he missed deep love or intimate friendship for fear of connecting deeply? He knew that he wore himself out “being good” in relationships—obviously in an effort to stave off the anticipated painful disconnection disaster. In addition, Horst had developed a secure, trusting relationship

with his therapist—depending on his therapist to see him safely through all of this fragmenting trauma. Was that relationship, too, setting off these fears? Tears streaked down Horst’s cheeks in therapy session and frightening sensations coursed through his body as he contemplated the fears associated with love.

How the Fear of Connecting Forms in Early Childhood

Connecting to others has proven dangerous to us in many ways in the past. We have all been injured by others we loved in the course of growing up. The experience stored in our BMR connection is that life itself is somehow threatened. We had no capacity in early childhood to think objectively or to reason out the actual reality of the interrupted connection. Nor did we have the capacity to deal effectively with the potential threat that ruptured connections posed to our wellbeing. From the core of our being emerged a fear of feeling annihilated in response to painful rejections of our longings and devastating lost connections.

Thus our fear of making connections was born. Entering into a deep relationship meant risking ourselves, our wellbeing, even our lives. Or so it seemed. Better to stay frozen. Better to avoid such risks by cutting off frightening feelings. Better to flee than to risk injury. Better to create a fight that maintains distance rather than to connect lovingly.

When we were children our biological instincts told us, “If you get hurt like that again, you may not survive!” That may have been true then. But it is not true now. We can have bad feelings and live through them. As adults we are capable of experiencing and sustaining the pain of rejection. But as children we did not know this; we could only fear the pain of re-traumatization. We learned to freeze, flee, or fight our way through relationships.

Making Contact with Your BMR connection

Imagine yourself approaching someone with whom you are in the process of developing an emotionally significant relationship. Your partner likewise approaches. It could be your spouse, your

child, your grandchild, one of your parents, a sibling or a friend, your therapist, or even someone special with whom you work or play.

You feel alive and happy to be seeing your special person and excited by the feelings you have for each other. You both smile as you greet each other warmly. Your eyes gleam with eager anticipation as you begin the engagement. Two hearts pick up their pace as the relating dance proceeds. You two have been in this place before, co-creating experiences of joy, laughter, sadness, pain, grief, anger, inspiration, mutual regard, and love.

And then, just when things are starting to get good, something starts happening inside. You feel yourself backpedaling, pulling away. Perhaps you find yourself thinking about how many things you have to do today or about something you have to pick up at the store. Some part of you is drifting off toward seemingly unrelated thoughts and pictures. In your reverie you may find yourself feeling drowsy, moody, tired, or cautious—for no reason you can readily point to. You may be getting inexplicably tense or antsy.

You may be aware of voice strain, shoulder pain, or of some other discomfort somewhere in your body.

As the relating dance continues, you make a quick, valiant attempt to figure out what's going on with you or what's going on with your partner in the interaction that is causing your attention and focus to drift away. You wonder what's happening in your BMR connection at the moment to cause this distancing, this breach in intimate contact.

An invisible wall is going up. Emotional distance is threatening. "What's happening around here, anyway," you ask yourself. "This is my child I love so deeply. These moments are fleeting and precious—why am I feeling bored?" Or, "This is my spouse, my lover with whom I would rather spend time than anyone else on Earth. Why am I mentally fleeing the scene?" Or, "This is my best friend, my trusted colleague, my valued client, or my therapist, with whom I truly treasure my time. What's happening to spoil my enjoyment, to wreck these few precious

moments of intimacy, to limit my opportunity for enrichment and transformation?”

If you're lucky you may soon realize that your internal process itself, your fear of connecting reflex, is actually causing the rupture in your connection at the moment. If you are skilled at the relating game you may attempt to process your feelings with your partner. Perhaps you feel edgy, nervous, hyperactive, distracted, constricted, or drowsy. It's possible even that you first noticed these feelings when you thought it was your partner who was feeling them rather than yourself. You might think to ask yourself, “Why am I feeling this way at this particular moment?”

You attempt a quick recovery. Maybe you are able to take a deep breath and dive back into the fast-paced fray of the relating dance and be okay. Maybe not. Perhaps processing what's happening with your partner will help. But maybe you suspect that the particular trend toward disconnection that you are experiencing at this moment haunts the bigger picture of your relationships, your intimacy, your love. Perhaps you realize these feelings have been

around in subtle or perhaps not so subtle ways for a lifetime. “How does what I am experiencing at this moment fit into the bigger picture of my life? What are my hopes and desires here? What are my dreads and fears? Why and in what ways does this loss of connectedness frequently happen to me?”

Involuntarily disconnecting this way happens to all of us in various ways from time to time, but we seldom consciously focus on the process. At the time we may hardly consider the discomfort we’re experiencing as a fear reflex. At certain moments of building excitement, of increasing intimate connecting, we simply find ourselves feeling cautious, silently backpedaling, or drifting off. We may find ourselves jumping from thought to thought or entirely blanking out what’s happening in the moment. It’s important to recognize that we are rupturing the connection from inside ourselves. That we are unconsciously creating the disconnection we so much fear in close relationships.

We may successfully reconnect with our partner, but then find it difficult to sustain that connection. There are myriad ingenious

ways of pursuing and then rupturing or limiting the aliveness of connections. Can love last? Certainly not, until and unless we get to the bottom of this puzzle of our fear reflexes—how connecting and disconnecting work for us personally.

Alternate strategies that some people use for dealing with the fear of connecting, include being frantically driven to connect with others almost nonstop. Incessant talking, intrusive questions, dogged pursuit, and uncontrolled stalking activities are all compulsive attempts to engage others in what passes for interpersonal connection. But this is not mutual connection because the intensity is essentially one-sided. In denial of their own fears of connecting, such people create pseudo-connections all day long in real life or in cyberspace, that are time- and energy-consuming—and in the long-run frustrating and unsatisfying.

Bringing the Fear of Connecting into Consciousness

If we hope to contact the fear of connecting we will need to learn how to monitor our feelings in the course of our intimate

exchanges. Perhaps you are feeling restless, irritable, impatient, drowsy or bored. Perhaps you are having a hard time maintaining your concentration or focusing on the here-and-now relating process. These are likely indications that the fear of connection is active, so search your body carefully for exactly where the telltale tensions are.

Your goal in contacting the fear of connecting is to locate where in your body-mind-relationship self something distracting is happening. Then to find words and images to describe your feelings. My earlier dream of being “scared to death” in the burnt child story gave me important pictures to go with the troubling body states I was feeling. In that way I was able to get in touch with the childhood origins of fear reflexes still operating in the present.

In a relationship in which you are committed to being fully present and alive with each other it can be a good idea to make an agreement on how to signal each other when either of you feel yourselves pulling away. The signal is a call to pay attention to

what's going on, and then to see if you can relate the disconnect to the body experiences you are having.

Once you realize that you emotionally disconnect—often without even being aware of it—you can then begin tracking exactly when in the interaction the disconnects occur and then explore how each of you experience the need to disconnect. Over time you and your partner can develop a here-and-now focus on what happens in your BMR connections when you over-ride the urge to disconnect and work on staying alive and connected in the moment. Over-riding the long-standing disconnecting urge often elicits some kind of disturbing experience. For example, reactions involving shaking or crying, or perhaps even a sense of confusion, numbness, or fragmentation may result. Relating partners can cultivate the ability to stay with whatever anguish or pain may erupt as each person over-rides the disconnect impulse and stays fully emotionally present.

Release from fear reflexes comes about by feeling encouraged to experience the fullness of the fear in the present relationship. In

this way each partner can fully know that these conditioned fear reflexes live on in our BMR connections and are simply triggered by the present relating situation. Through a process of mutual study the fear of connecting reflex can make itself known to each partner.

I find in any emotionally significant relationship it takes me quite a while to learn how to track the other person's emotional disconnections. In childhood we have all been trained to carry on smoothly in social interactions, regardless of what is silently happening inside. So the other person may be connecting and disconnecting emotionally in ways that are hard to identify until we have learned each other's styles.

In an effort to get to know the other person more deeply I may find myself saying something like, "you know, this is a fascinating story about what went on at dinner Wednesday night, but I sense that somewhere in the telling you lost interest, you somehow drifted away emotionally. Where are we right now?" Or, "only a few minutes ago we were laughing and having a good time

discussing your reactions to that wonderful movie, but then something happened and it seems like a part of you left the room—what happened between us?” Or, “this habit you say you have of switching topics often without knowing why—did that just happen? Can we look at what may be going on between us that caused the shift?” Or, “you know, I just had that same puzzling angry sensation I sometimes get when I’m with you—could it be that I was irritated that you began going more into your head rather than staying emotionally connected with your body and with me?” These would all be my attempts at calling attention to the disconnecting process as something perhaps worthy of attention. It might also be that what feels like a disconnect in my partner may be my own way of disconnecting so we have to talk about that. As a therapist I often use my own awareness of my disconnecting tendencies in order to better grasp the nature of what’s going on in my interactions with my clients—whether in my BMR connection or theirs.

If you want to study your fear of connecting reflex, work towards raising your consciousness of when you silently disconnect in various kinds of relationship situations. Pay close attention to how your fear of connecting reflex appears in your body-mind-relationship self. Try to focus the fear of connecting reflex as it appears in the course of each day by using the “Put on Your Aliveness Monitor” and “Touching Base with Your Body” exercises. Take some time to study your fear of connecting reflex and to get some relief from it by searching for sensations, words and images that accompany all of your relationship situations.

3. The Fear of Being Abandoned

After having connected emotionally or bonded with someone, we fear being either abandoned with our own needs or being swallowed up by the other person's. In either case we feel the world is not a dependable place; that we live in danger of emotional abandonment. We may

become clingy and dependent or we may become super-independent—or both.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Abandonment is

About

Mala believed her marriage was ideal. Her husband, Hiromi, seemed motivated to provide well and was able to give her a beautiful daughter late in her life. In her happiness she resumed singing after 18 years of being away from it and was soon accorded great esteem as a local star. Indeed her voice was truly remarkable.

But when Mala was diagnosed with breast and ovarian cancer Hiromi was not at the hospital for the radical surgery nor was he able to help care for her or to empathize with her illness or great losses. While recovering, Mala resumed her voice lessons and choral singing but shortly thereafter was stricken with total aphonia—complete loss of her voice for two months. Medical tests revealed the aphonia was wholly psychological; there was nothing physically wrong with her voice.

Not long after the cancer surgery and Hiromi's inability to be responsive to Mala, it became clear to her that her marriage was anything but ideal. She painfully realized that, in fact, it had never been good. In her eagerness for an ideal life she had been in denial of how much he depended on her and expected her to be totally at his beck-and-call. As her belief that she was living a fulfilled life gradually broke down and she realized that she would have to leave Hiromi, Mala lost her voice—and with it her belief in her happiness. In an effort to find solutions she began to review her life. Perhaps she could discover clues that would help her reclaim her happiness.

Mala recalled that as an infant her first words were song. Everyone in the family and neighborhood loved her voice and her singing. She grew up being praised for being “a little angel”—always the star in church pageants and later in choirs and all of the school musicals. Singing was the one thing she felt she could do to please her mother, to get her mother's attention, to make her mother proud of her—or so Mala thought.

Later in therapy Mala realized that her mother's pride was more about what a good mother she was to have such a talented child. The truth was that she'd never taken much pleasure in her child's successes.

At sixteen Mala had entered a scholarship contest and won—all expenses paid to go to college in California. Her starring role in the senior musical, followed by the scholarship and the prospect of touring with the college choir the following year was a glorious triumph. Then came the fateful night when her mother took her to the Chicago airport for her trip to California. Over dinner at the hotel Mother got uproariously drunk and began raging at Mala for leaving home, for abandoning her, for selfishly considering only herself. Didn't she realize Mother would be left alone with no emotional support! These revelations came as total shock to Mala who always believed her mother wanted her to sing and that her mother was proud of her for going to college with a singing scholarship. With a dark cloud over her head, Mala reluctantly boarded the plane. She managed with difficulty to fulfill her

singing obligations for that first year. Then she dropped the scholarship and never sang again—for eighteen years. Only when she came to believe that her life with Hiromi was ideal and joyous had she been able to sing.

With hindsight Mala realized that she had always been bound to her mother's happiness, doing anything and everything to keep her emotionally fragile mother from coming apart. While in therapy several short bouts of aphonia made clear that her throat constrictions were her internal mother's commands not to leave her, not to have a life of her own, not to have relationships other than with Mother, not to be truly joyful on her own, not to have her own voice in life.

Following Mala's mother's death, this entire scenario was transferred to Hiromi whom she also emotionally supported. With her abandonment issues seemingly solved by her marriage, she was able to start voice lessons and resume chorale singing. But as Mala formed important independent relationships with her singing teacher and with members of her chorale, cancer had struck. Later

when Mala resumed singing lessons she lost her voice completely—in obedience to her internal mother’s command—triggered by Hiromi’s insecurities—not to be emotionally independent, not to have her own voice.

In therapy Mala realized that for a lifetime she had kept herself in self-limiting and self-effacing positions that emotionally supported her mother and later her husband for fear of them emotionally abandoning her. The command not to be joyous for herself, or to enjoy herself with others, lived in her throat and chest. When emotional independence threatened, her throat muscles fiercely constricted to keep her from having her own voice—thus strangulating her body-mind-relational self until she got into therapy to study her BMR connection.

How the Fear of Abandonment Forms in Childhood

When as young children we bonded with our caregivers and then later came to experience those people as emotionally or psychologically unavailable to us, the painful fear of abandonment

became established in our BMR connection. The dominant abandonment feelings are sadness, depletion, and loss, though we may also experience self-blame. If we had just been good enough we wouldn't have been abandoned.

In the face of abandonment we tend to develop substitute gratifications to soothe the pain—later known to us as personal addictions. Or, in order to avoid the depressive feelings of loss, emptiness, or hopelessness, we may become self-sufficient, taking care of everyone's needs but our own (co-dependency). We may become clingy, demanding, and possessive (over-dependency). Or we may learn to manipulate and control those around us somewhat ruthlessly (sociopathy). All of these strategies contribute toward making certain that we don't have to feel our dreaded abandonment fears.

Later in life when we bond with another person, we may fear being either left alone with our own needs or swallowed up by the other's. In either case the fear reflex involved relates to our feeling

of being emotionally abandoned—a deep-seated belief that relationships are not dependable or safe.

Making Contact with Your BMR Connection

Consider a relationship you have had at one point in your life that has been very satisfying and close to your ideal. Think of the person and three or four strong qualities that made that relationship truly worthwhile and good.

Now think of some important relationship in your life that was once hopeful but then turned out especially badly. Think of that person and name three or four qualities that made the relationship seem less than worthwhile or perhaps flat-out bad.

Whether we like to admit it or not, it is probably fair to say that all of these qualities we just thought about—both good and bad—characterize the kind of person we have been drawn to in the past and the kinds of people we are likely to be attracted to in the future! These personal qualities have a certain familiarity, a certain subliminal draw for us. Over the years we have developed

a strong affinity toward the positive traits of that personality and a certain capacity to overlook the negative traits.

We know that we are attracted to similar kinds of relationships. And we can usually specify where in our pasts we have previously experienced both the good and the bad qualities. San Francisco psychiatrists, Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, in *A General Theory of Love*, demonstrate convincingly how we learn to be attracted to certain emotional qualities in others. They show us how this can be related to a level of actual brain and neuron conditioning that starts at or before birth. Unfortunately, we usually go for the types of people who will be the worst for us in long-term relationships. We repeatedly replicate childhood emotional relationships because they are known and familiar to us. We also repeat disturbing relationships because we are attempting to master our earliest relationship traumas and fears!

How often have we told ourselves “never again”...but then later...all over again, somehow we repeat the same scenario. It can be impossible to determine if the new people somehow really

are the same as old relationships or we're simply experiencing them that way because of fear reflexes. Nevertheless, these are the people we tend to become involved with, bonded to, and with whom we repeatedly form emotional attachments. And, of course it is also these people with whom we continue to experience emotional abandonment.

Now comes the really hard part for most of us to grasp. We suffer greatly when we lose people whom we have become emotionally attached to, who possess familiar, sought-after qualities—both good and bad! We tend to become greatly agitated and/or depressed when once valued relationships come to a grinding halt. We are strangely reluctant to end emotionally engaging attachments—no matter how bad they are for us!

Regardless of how many times we tell ourselves that we are better off that the bad relationship is ending or has ended, we keep replaying in our minds and bodies the trauma of that loss. We obsess about the person and the relationship, unable to simply let

go. We dread the great internal pain always involved in such losses.

Therapists first began to understand our uncanny “compulsion to repeat” emotionally significant relationships when it became clear that emotionally abused children gravitate toward emotionally abusive adults, and that battered women gravitate toward battering men. It turns out that in our own ways we all do basically the same. As psychiatrist Martha Stark, in her book *Working with Resistance*, says we move toward repeating our worst old fears in new relationships!

So the fear of abandonment doesn’t simply mean that someone disappointed us, let us down, or betrayed us but rather that an important enmeshed relationship, with all of its positive and negative qualities of emotional familiarity, has ceased and that our body-mind-relationship self is painfully counting and recounting its losses. Anyone who has been through a divorce or who has lost a parent or loved one knows the devastation of such loss, even if the actual circumstances of the final loss are a relief.

Alternate strategies for dealing with the fear of abandonment by long-familiar emotional attachments include manic reactions that deny the depressive effects of loss. One declares that one never cared in the first place, that one was never really attached to the lost person, or that one should have seen the betrayal coming all along. In manic abandon one races around cracking jokes and at funerals feels nothing—or in extreme instances breaks into uncontrollable laughter before the wake begins. Manic denials may temporarily protect us from abandonment depression—but at what price?

Abandonment Role-Reversals

An important variation of fear of abandonment reflexes is the reversal of roles from the way we first experienced abandonment. That is, fear abandonment reflexes show up in the ways we ruthlessly abandon others who are attached to us. The Golden Rule of relating might be: “We do unto others what was once done

unto us.” Or: “We get others to do unto us what has been done to us before.”

Role-reversal reflexes, based on the fear of abandonment, are much more common than one might think—why? During the course of growing up and building internal working models of expectable relationship scenarios, the young child not only experiences her or his own abandonment fear at the hands of caregivers, but also learns the caregivers’ role in the abandonment scenario. That is, in an effort to master the abandoning scenario set up by the parent or caregiver, the young child learns to predict how the abandonment fear reflex of the parent or caregiver works. Thus, we not only carry within us our own fear reflexes, developed in response abandonment experiences we have suffered, but we also carry abandonment reflexes learned by imitating our parents and caregivers.

Role-reversal abandonment scenarios are seldom conscious. Rather, the scenarios are manifest in our characteristic ways of interacting in relationships. We seldom notice role-reversal

abandonment scenarios until a partner complains that we are abandoning them emotionally, in one way or another.

First the good news. Role-reversal fear of abandonment scenarios are not the direct result of abandonment experiences themselves. Rather, role-reversal scenarios are simply learned by imitation of or identification with our parents' ways of abandoning us. As such, imitative abandonment scenarios often feel inauthentic or somehow inconsistent with a person's fundamental character. Also they are not so deeply embedded in our BMR connections as are abandonments that directly impacted us.

Next the bad news! As you act out your parents' ways of interacting your partner will surely feel the pangs of fear! This is because you are doing to them what so often was done to you. You are manipulating them by stimulating distress and fear. When we swear that we will never treat our children as our parents treated us, it is this imitative dimension of human interactions that we are speaking of. And yet how often, much to our horror, we find ourselves doing exactly what we have vowed never to do.

Often therapy clients with great shame find themselves behaving in perfectly horrible ways toward loved ones—ways that seem not at all in keeping with their general character. I have to point out to them, “but this isn’t really you behaving in this way. It’s the way you as a young child took in, identified with your mother. The mother inside you is the one who is being so ugly in this situation.” This doesn’t let one off the hook for bad behavior, but it does allow a realistic perspective on what is happening. As a person relinquishes such identifications, grief reactions do occur, with accompanying depression and fear of abandonment because some internal piece of self is being given up or lost.

Bringing the Fear of Abandonment into Consciousness

In my closest relationships I often pick up signs of depression in myself or in the other person the minute we get together. One or both of us may be a little slowed down, less lively or less cheerful than usual. I find that people can often acknowledge that they feel a little off and sometimes are quickly able to say what has

happened to set this tiredness or depressive feeling off. But most of us are not aware of how some childhood fear of abandonment reflex may have been triggered by something emotional leaving us feeling sad, sluggish and down. I listen carefully to whatever is being discussed with an eye to bringing to light something that is being lost in this person's life or my own—something that is setting off an abandonment depression reflex. As we relate it seems important to contact whatever body-mind-relationship sensations, words and images are present and to link them to whatever is being lost.

We each have our own personalized ways of feeling the lifelessness of abandonment and depression. The challenge is to get in touch with how loss hits each of us in our BMR connection.

4. The Fear of Self-Assertion

We have all experienced rejection and perhaps even punishment for expressing ourselves in a way that others don't like. We thus may learn to fear asserting ourselves

and letting our needs be known in relationships. We feel the world does not allow us to be truly ourselves. We may either cease putting ourselves out there altogether, we may assert ourselves with a demanding vengeance, or we may even relate in passive-aggressive ways.

A Story Illustrating What the Fear of Self-Assertion is About

The best story I know to illustrate how a fear of self-assertion reflex can work to limit performance for a lifetime is my own burnt child story I related earlier. While unconsciously anticipating attack from captive audiences at state-required continuing education classes, I became aware of holding pain in my upper neck, lower back and voice muscles. When I asserted myself in these public forums my body was recalling frightening and physically abusive experiences of early childhood at the hand of my angry father when I attempted to assert myself.

The memories of severe punishments for asserting myself were living on in my BMR connection in the form of painful fear

reflexes. These reflexes were diminishing my performance and my enjoyment of my teaching experiences.

There is an additional factor that I have not told you yet. At 7 years of age my parents, much to my chagrin, were seeking to adopt a girl. By the time I was 8 they had indeed adopted two girls—over my vigorous protests. In the end there was no attempt to take my feelings into account or to acknowledge them in any way. My desires in the matter were harshly squelched and my life as I had known it was devalued, invaded and crushed by the unwanted adoptions. The little child in me cried, wasn't I enough of a boy-girl for them? How I must have strained my back and neck crying out to have my voice heard—to no avail. The dream depicts a boy-girl child locked in a fiery furnace on a self-imposed torture rack stretching his/her back, neck and voice to painful limits, screaming bloody murder for help from Daddy. Whatever my feelings or reasons were at the time, my self-assertion was not welcome and I realize now that I have carried that fear reflex into

any number of painful relationship experiences well into adulthood.

How the Fear of Self-Assertion Forms in Childhood

Once a child has experienced a robust bonding dance with her caregivers, she has learned personhood in relationship to them and what they expect. But inevitably the moment comes when her imagination comes alive and she wants to do things her own way. To the extent that her “no,” her opposition, and her negativity, cannot be appreciated, respected, and negotiated by caregivers, she will either collapse into herself, feeling crushed, or oppose with an angry vengeance, or both. But in either case she fears asserting her own way. Thus, the earliest ways we learned as toddlers to say no or to stand against the wishes of others, and the consequences we experienced for doing so, become mind-body-relationship fear reflexes governing future assertions of our psychological autonomy and how we expect our assertions to be met by others.

Later in life when our way cannot be received by those who love us, we may become frightened when we speak out, express negativity, affirm our differences, or attempt to get some separateness from others. We may fear that our efforts, our “no,” or our relational anger will be punished. We may feel shamed or crushed. Or we may get the message that we won’t be loved if we behave that way. If we are not “good” in the expected manner we come to fear that we won’t have the needed connection with our loved ones anymore. The threat of being humiliated or crushed leaves us afraid to assert ourselves.

Self-assertion or the assertion of emotional independence or autonomy is often associated with the expression of anger and the fear of its consequences. Psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller in *Women’s Growth in Connection*, points out that most people agree that we have problems with the expression of anger in our society. She holds, however, that the main problem is not with anger expression per se but with constraints to the expression of anger—even to the extent that we often do not even know if and when we

are angry. Anger as communication of emotion, says Dr. Miller, tells us that something is wrong, that something hurts, or that something needs attention or changing. Anger provides an important recognition of discomfort and a cause for personal action. If anger as a communication to others can be expressed and recognized then it has served a good purpose.

However, when we express our anger it doesn't guarantee that someone will be there to listen and truly understand our needs. The fear at any age in life may be that retaliation, resentment, and/or the experience of feeling crushed will be the end result of anger expression, of self-assertion, or of a striving for emotional independence or autonomy.

We have all experienced rejection and perhaps even punishment for expressing ourselves in ways that others don't like. We thus may learn to fear asserting ourselves and letting our needs be known in relationships. We feel the world does not allow us to be truly ourselves. We may either cease putting ourselves out there altogether, we may assert ourselves with a demanding

vengeance, or we may even relate in passive-aggressive ways. We'd best behave ourselves to preserve our valued bonded or committed relationships.

An alternate strategy to the fear reflex of suppressing self-assertion is to be loudly, insistently and aggressively asserting oneself all the time. In denying the fear of self-assertion, one runs roughshod over everyone else and expects not to get into trouble. I think of the kind of person who constantly dominates every conversation, raising his voice to interrupt or talk over people. Unbridled aggression or anger that is expressed in an attacking way usually does get us into trouble in relationships.

Making Contact with Your BMR connection

Imagine that you are about to meet someone you have a close relationship with and whom you respect and value greatly. Let's call that person Sally. For some time now you have realized that a basic difference in points of view has been developing between Sally and you. Sally seems to have been moving forward

unilaterally, doing things and making decisions that affect both of you—without fully taking your feelings or your views into account. You have attempted to express your concern but haven't yet seemed to have gotten through to Sally. The situation is clearly coming to a head and you are going to have to do some major confronting.

You have thought of simply going along with Sally's way, but that really doesn't work for you. Maybe if you backed off a little, things would go better? But no, this growing disparity is too important to you. You simply have to hold your ground. It looks as though there's going to be a rumble. You are quite nervous getting ready to speak your piece. You are perspiring, your heart is pounding, your fists are tightened, your jaw is set—you're getting ready for a full-on battle. Here it comes!

Then you're in the midst of it. Your fears and anxieties rise as the moment of confrontation approaches. You feel that surge of energy required when it comes to insisting that your views be

respected, and if necessary, mustering up anger in order to be heard.

No one is without fear and anxiety when getting prepared to “speak one’s piece” in a relationship or in a group. This is especially true when you know your position is not an acceptable or popular one. The living memory of how dangerous it has been to have your own voice comes alive. Maybe you first notice it in your hesitation to stand up for what you think or believe. You may fear being criticized, put down, embarrassed, humiliated, shamed, blamed, or crushed for having personal beliefs and opinions.

Bringing the Fear of Self-Assertion into Consciousness

The actual fear of self-assertion is closer to consciousness than some of the other fear reflexes since we usually are aware when we are about to oppose someone and we therefore feel the anxiety of anticipation. However, when we focus on our deep fear reflexes in our BMR connection we may come up with some surprising, if not shocking or terrifying, sensations, words and images beneath that

clinchd jaw, that trembling nostril, that tightened fist, or that outstretched neck.

The perfect example, again, is my “scared to death” burnt child story. By agreeing to teach state-mandated classes in law and ethics to therapists I can be sure that there will be any number of people in the room who did not choose to be there. Their aggression will be mobilized over having to give up a Saturday, to pay a sizable fee and to sit six hours in a hotel conference room to take a class they never wanted to take in the first place.

Even though I am not personally the one who required them to be in class, in agreeing to teach the class I put myself in a position to receive displaced rage. I do think that I make the class interesting and that most therapists do leave feeling glad for what they learned. But early in the day the resentful tension fills the room and my body picks it up.

Until my colleague Gayle suggested that I stretch into the tension and allow myself time and space for sensations, words and images to arrive, I would never have suspected that my neck, back,

and throat tension had anything to do with my childhood abuse by my father who invariably violently disagreed with everything I chose to do and the way I chose to do it! In contacting the fear of self-assertion we need to monitor our body for the exact locations of the tensions. Then we need to allow sensations, words and images to surface from our body-mind-relationship constrictions.

In emotionally significant relationships I have learned to be always on the alert for the slightest sign of anger in a person's voice, body language, or the stories they are telling me. I have learned to ask about the tenseness, to try to bring the full range of anger out into the relationship. As a therapist at times I urge people to scream whatever they need to say at me, to use wildly aggressive language if necessary, or even to use degrading and murderous phrases—whatever it takes to raise the roof in order to focus the problem in the here-and-now emotional relating of this room.

When the fear reflexes are mobilized in the BMR connection in the here-and-now of emotional relating I can tune into wherever

the tension is and try to come up with what's going on now for them or between us. More often than not past rages pour out, sometimes tears of impotence and defeat, sometimes victorious shouts, sometimes vindictive threats. But whatever comes up it quickly links the body-mind-relationship constrictions with patterns of painful if not terrifying past oppositions.

As a therapist I may say something like, “this sounds like you’ve been in this place before, can you tell me about it?” Or, “you say you are really pissed off, but I also think I hear some hurt—what’s that about?” Or, “are you stifling your true feelings about him?—you know this is the place to really let the anger and hate out!” Or, “of course you aren’t going to strangle her, but that’s the feeling her actions are bringing up for you—try owning your wish to strangle her and see where it takes you.” Or, “it sounds like what I said to you last session brought up a lot of feeling, but you seem reluctant to let it fly at me.”

Anger as communication in a relationship does say something is wrong, something hurts, something in me feels small and

helpless, cornered. If we want to get to the fear of self-assertion the path is likely to be anger leading to fear and injury. Dave's story about the stresses he encountered at the car dealer illustrates well how childhood humiliations re-appear in present situations to elicit anger, fear and helplessness.

5. The Fear of Lack of Recognition

When we do not get the acceptance and confirmation we need in relationships, we are left with a feeling of not being seen or recognized for who we really are. We may then fear we will not be affirmed or confirmed in our relationships. Or we may fear that others will only respect and love us if we are who they want us to be. We may work continuously to feel seen and recognized by others or we may give up in rage, humiliation or shame.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Lack of Recognition is About

Pierre has been planning a fiftieth birthday party for his partner of 22 years, Gregorio. Months ago Pierre had ordered new carpet and drapes for the front rooms of the house. Their decorator friend, Terrence, had helped him select some truly new and exciting colors and fabrics with accent pillows to fluff up the old couch a bit. Several rooms had been re-painted, and the bathrooms tastefully refurbished. The master bedroom, guest room, study, and exercise room had all been shifted around to favorably display the artwork they had brought back from their travels over the years.

Pierre ran out of money before he could have their kitchen entirely remodeled to his satisfaction—but he was able to get some new counter-tops on sale that his handyman, Patrick, was able to install before painting the cabinets and walls.

Pierre had searched for new accessories at all his favorite boutiques for months and had located a number of remarkable

additions to the house. Lulu's had agreed to cater an authentic French country dinner with fresh seafood crepes prepared on the premises. The Village Winery had given him a really good deal on birthday champagne, French table wine, and some new crystal wine glasses. Black Forest Bakery was doing their famous double chocolate cake with Hershey Bar icing—Gregg's favorite. He purchased new party shirts for himself and Gregg from Franco's Italian Menswear where they both liked to shop.

The birthday occasion was clearly to be the event of the season for Pierre, Greggorio and all of their friends. Everything was in readiness. As guests arrived birthday gifts and greetings were presented to Greggorio—but Pierre and his many house and garden creations were clearly the center of attention. Everyone wanted to know where this statue and that plant came from? They wanted to know how on earth Pierre ever thought to put this together with that? How had Pierre managed to get Lulu herself to do the crepes? Would Pierre explain how he got his cymbidiums to put on such tall spikes? Pierre was basking in tribute and self-

satisfaction as the evening came and went with Greggorio and friends praising all of his accomplishments that had made the event such a smashing success.

The crowd slowly dwindled and George and Estéphano cleared up the worst of the after-party mess. With just a few close friends hanging around still sipping drinks, Pierre began to feel depleted. What was going on for him? Everything had been a great success—but no one had noticed the new draperies or matching accent pillows. No one commented on his or Greggorio's new shirts either. Pierre noticed that Greggorio was so busy with friends that he barely touched his seafood crepe or the Hershey Bar double chocolate cake. The list of disappointments raced through Pierre's mind as he tried to maintain good cheer until the last guests left.

Later in bed Gregg thanked him profusely and praised him for the wonderful occasion he had hosted. They made love and Gregg rolled over and went to sleep. But Pierre continued to cast randomly over the events of the evening. How dare Giovanni

suggest that he saw those very wine glasses at Costco last week! Destinie remarked that his butt was cute but she missed the new shirts entirely! All the possible slights of the evening and the numerous small faux pas came back to Pierre in a fit of indignant rage. His true measure of success had been entirely missed by virtually everyone. The time, the money, the talent that he had lavished on them all—like pearls to swine. Pierre dropped into a pit of despondency marked by occasional flashes of revenge—and then shame followed for not appreciating what wonderful friends he had and how lucky he was to have Greggorio.

Yes, the birthday party had been a great success, but Pierre's insatiable quest for recognition had left him a disappointed, resentful, and an ashamed wreck afterwards. After all, how much recognition and acclaim do any of us need? And what happens in our BMR connection when the lack of recognition fear reflex gets triggered?

How the Fear of Lack of Recognition Forms in Childhood

In the past when we did not get the affirmation, confirmation, inspiration, or recognition that we needed from important people in our lives, we were left with the feeling of not being good enough. So we learned to search or push others for the recognition that we felt we needed. We may have come to fear that others would only respect and love us if we are who they want us to be and admire us for it. We came to feel the world does not accept or honor who we really are or what we have to offer.

When we experience not being seen, affirmed, reflected, or recognized in a positive or satisfying way, we fear we don't count, that we can't measure up, or that we'll never matter enough to anyone. As children when we did not live up to our parent's expectations or to an image projected by society, then we may have felt worthless, impotent or at least less than adequate or special.

We may have learned to compensate for lack of recognition with a tendency toward perfectionism or with grandiose fantasies

of who we are. But grandiosity is like a balloon that can be deflated in an instant by the pinprick of any real or imagined criticism or slight. Then we're back to square one, feeling worthless, a sham, a phony, a slob or no good.

On the deepest level, we may feel humiliated by our intense desires for recognition. We may fear that we don't deserve the life or the relationships that we do have. Or we may feel ashamed for seeking the kinds of self-recognition that we know we need.

As alternate strategies we may walk around radiating the picture of extreme modesty when in fact we are deflated and feel bad about ourselves for not being worthy of more recognition. Or conversely, we may puff ourselves up with forced grandiosity—demanding or eliciting from others the steady confirmation we cannot provide for ourselves. In either case we may fear that people around us sense our inner emptiness, depletion, low self-esteem and insecurity.

Making Contact With your BMR connection

Imagine that you are about to meet someone for lunch or a drink whom you do not know very well. The meeting is important because this person may be able to give you some good ideas or provide you with some important networking connections. Or you may see this person as a possible candidate for a good friend or personal relationship. The meeting is exploratory. You have dressed up a little for the occasion, but have taken care not to overdo it. As you approach the meeting you become conscious of your hair, your fingernails, and your overall appearance. You hope to make a favorable impression.

The meeting begins somewhat cautiously with each of you feeling a little tense, commenting on the weather, the restaurant, and today's headlines looking for views you hold in common. As the pace picks up you find yourself starting to drop names and to mention places you have visited in your travels when you really hadn't intended to discuss such things. Or, perhaps feeling pleased with how well read you are, you find yourself throwing in

comments about a couple of recent books you have read. You may offer insightful comments on current movies or new albums. You perhaps mention a few recent purchases made at upscale shops or special bargains you have managed lately.

You know that you hate this kind of patting yourself on the back, but it is inadvertent and your companion seems to be enjoying it and reciprocating in kind. There is a mutual need for recognition that you both are experiencing and expressing. The exchange goes well and profitably for both of you, even if you are worrying that you may be overdoing it a bit!

We do need ongoing recognition, admiration, and confirmation, from others, despite how awkward it sometimes feels. When the needed and appropriate recognition isn't forthcoming we feel a little insecure or tense. If our narcissism is wounded greatly we may feel rageful or even ashamed that we need certain kinds of recognition or that we become upset when it is not forthcoming.

Bringing the Fear of Lack of Recognition into Consciousness

We are so shamed as children for taking pride in ourselves—for patting ourselves on the back or tooting our own horn, that we are often unaware of when and where we could use some genuine personal recognition. Or the reverse may be true, that we hide behind such a cloak of modesty that people have to strain to give us the recognition we deserve.

Mutual recognition in rewarding relationships is essential. We all have different ways of putting ourselves out there to be seen and of enjoying the affirmation that recognition by important others entails. Pierre may be an extreme case but he is certainly not alone!

In my emotionally significant relationships I try to be as sensitive as I can to when people are proud of themselves for some achievement and I work hard to bring out that pride. I find myself encouraging people to enjoy the personal confirmation involved by feeling recognized in important ways by myself and others.

By the same token I try to sensitize myself to moments when something has happened and needed recognition has not been forthcoming—either from myself or from others. Everyone has a fear of lack of recognition reflex that gets triggered when we need some affirming recognition and it is not forthcoming. Being mindful at all times of the BMR connection and the need for recognition as well as disappointed longings for recognition can be a part of any significant relationship.

It's painful to want to be seen, to want to be valued for who we are and for what we have to offer, and then to feel there is not enough appreciation or recognition. This pain was experienced repeatedly in various ways throughout our childhoods so we have deep fear reflexes that make us sensitive to empathic failure from others.

Often our reactions are notably subdued—a dampening of the spirits or a physical complaint like fatigue, sluggishness or mild physical symptoms in response to a failure of empathic recognition. At other times the reaction is rage at the other for

missing us. Or it may even be a sense of shame for needing recognition.

As a therapist I may say something like, “now I understand, last session when you were telling me about how well your office presentation went you were expecting as much enthusiasm from me as you felt yourself. When I sat here like a bump on a log missing how truly important this was to you, you felt greatly let down. No wonder you didn’t quite feel like coming to see me today.” Or, “of course you’re angry, you put weeks into that PTA banquet and hardly a word of thanks was offered—I’d be furious myself!” Or, “I’m sorry, but I think the family should have been more appreciative rather than acting as if you were showing off—there is absolutely no reason to be ashamed simply because you want a little well-deserved recognition!”

We need to be able to sing along with Barbara—“Nobody’s going to rain on my parade!” And when somebody does dampen things for us, we can certainly take that opportunity to check out what tensions appear in our BMR connection.

Pierre needs to be honest with himself about his great fear of lack of recognition and try to learn where in his childhood his failing self-esteem came from. He pays an enormous emotional price for not having yet found ways to affirm himself and to enjoy the confirmations he does receive from others. In studying his BMR connection Pierre needs to allow himself to stay in touch with his incessant needs for tribute and to notice what happens to him when affirmation is not forthcoming. Stretching into the pain and allowing sensations, words, and images to appear is clearly the direction he needs to pursue. The “Put On Your Aliveness Monitor” and “Touching Base with Your Body” exercises will do a lot to put Pierre on the best course to understanding and obtaining relief from his fear of lack of recognition reflex.

6. The Fear of Failure and Success

When we have loved and lost or tried and failed, we may fear opening ourselves up to painful competitive experience again. When we have succeeded or won—possibly at

someone else's expense—we may experience guilt or fear retaliation. Thus we learn to hold back in love and life, thereby not risking either failure or success. We may feel the world does not allow us to be fulfilled. Or we may feel guilty and afraid for feeling fulfilled.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Failure and Success is About

Since antiquity the potentially tragic effects of triangular emotional relationships have been well known. The great myths and dramas of all time portray a hero or heroine caught up in some sort of a competitive love triangle. Oedipus in his love for his mother was caught up in competitive feelings with his father. Electra in her love for her father was caught up in competitive feelings with her mother.

Aurora's parents separated when she was three but she experienced in her upbringing a respectful and cooperative atmosphere between them. In her mid-twenties she married Serge whom she admired for the way he cared for her and his stated

ambitions in life. As the relationship developed, however, Serge became unbearably possessive and controlling, experiencing intense jealousy over her relationships with her family and her lifelong friends as well as her newly formed friends. His stated ambitions deteriorated into a general passivity. Most of the time he sat in front of the television watching sports.

As Aurora struggled to define her position in individual and couples counseling, she encountered deep-seated rage at her mother who, while always seeming to promise a special relationship with Aurora, in fact often emotionally deferred to her husband in a way that left Aurora feeling emotionally left out. Aurora was able to turn to her father for understanding and support while working on resolving her angry feelings at her sense of emotional abandonment by her mother.

Later in counseling Aurora got in touch with her rage at her father for his preoccupations with his work and his own love relationships which she had always experienced as emotionally excluding her. At this point she was able to turn toward her

mother for support in working out her rageful feelings toward her father.

Growing up as an only child with parents who were divorced at an early age had made it difficult for Aurora to experience and work through emotional triangles as a young child. As a result she was having to work through triangular relationship experiences in the context of having a husband who was unable to tolerate the competition of her loving relationships with her family and friends. Her distress in her marriage brought up her triangular relationship fear reflexes from childhood.

In the process of getting in touch with her fear reflexes regarding succeeding and failing in emotional triangles, Aurora realized that she could not stay in a marriage ruled by controlling jealousy. In the turmoil of the separation and divorce she experienced considerable anxiety and a variety of stress symptoms that affected various parts of her body.

Aurora met Nicole in the cafeteria at the company where she worked. Nicole's husband had died several years earlier from

pancreatic cancer as a young man. Both women were looking for a bonded relationship in which they could love and be loved. They longed for a relationship in which they could each experience strong loving relationships with friends and family as well. They soon moved in together and established a deeply committed relationship based on mutual love and respect.

It was only a matter of time before Aurora and Nicole found themselves wanting to share their love with a child. Who would carry the baby? Where would the sperm come from? Would their child know and have a relationship with the biological father? Would they be able to provide needed father figures for the child to relate to? How would friends and family react? Given the support each of them had experienced from their own parents in the course of growing up, how would they each as parents be able to establish a loving relationship with a child within a cooperative and inevitably competitive love triangle? Only time would tell.

How the Fear of Failure and Success Forms in Childhood

As a child growing up I feel some sense of security and control in my exclusive relationship with my mother. But when my father enters the room my relationship with her changes and I no longer feel the same sense of control over my relationship with her. In my exclusive relationship with my father I also develop a sense of security and control in what I can expect and cannot expect. When my mother enters the room everything changes and the sense of confidence I have in my relationship with my father is diminished. Worst for me is when they move into their exclusive love relationship with each other and I feel shut out, abandoned by both of them. Clearly three is a treacherous number for relationships. And yet our early family life and our later social life is filled with competitive emotional triangular relationships.

Relationship triangles are marked by cooperation and competition in giving and receiving love and respect. Relationship triangles are where as children we first develop the

fear of failure and fear of success reflexes that later become so deeply embedded in our BMR connections.

When our major fear is of failing—whether in love, in a chosen occupation, or in life in general—the deep fear is that we will be devastated if we fail. Failing is often unconsciously equated with emotional injury. If we fail in achievement or competition, we fear we will not survive the pain—our hearts will break. Failure in love means heartbreak. But failure in work or in goals we set for ourselves also feels devastating. Failure represents not measuring up, not making it. In order to protect ourselves from the pangs of failure, we often find that we don't open our hearts fully to others and we don't go "all out" in work or play.

Fear of succeeding is connected to the fear of being emotionally or physically maimed or killed. If I succeed in competition the third party in the triangle will either be destroyed or will wipe me out! On a rational level, of course, we know this isn't quite true. But on an unconscious or non-rational level, this primitive fear resides in each of us. So we often undermine our

efforts—we “blow the deal” or spoil the relationship—to assure ourselves that we won’t injure or be injured, that we won’t kill or be killed.

Underlying the fear of success and the fear of failure reflexes are the deep, unconscious fears of our own lust and murderous intents toward intervening or interfering third parties. We fear our painful demise in face of competition with third parties. Or we fear success with dangerous consequences. When we have loved and lost or tried and failed, we fear ever opening ourselves up to painful competitive experiences again. When we have succeeded or won—possibly at someone else’s expense—we fear guilt and the fear of retaliation. We learn to hold back in love and life, thereby not risking either failure or success. Deep in our BMR connection we come to feel the world does not allow us to be fulfilled.

In considering triangular relationships, the ways in which parents and children handle competition and cooperation in three-way relationships are paramount. In adult love relations the

history of our internalized love triangles is always silently played out in the background, in the bedroom, and with our friends, associates, and children.

An Aside on Morality

Moral issues are often associated with triangular relating, as it is the third person or force in each triangle that seems to dictate the rules for relating. But morality in different people takes different paths and often becomes structured differently for men than for women. Since morality is critical in three-way interactions it seems important to dwell for a moment on how men and women tend to experience morality in different ways.

In Carol Gilligan's, *In a Different Voice*, she reports her research into the different images of relationship that emerge when men and women are presented with the same moral dilemmas. Pictures of relational hierarchies (more valued by men) versus pictures of relational webs or networks (more valued by women) repeatedly occur in studies of morality. Images of a hierarchy and

images of a network convey different views of moral dilemmas that so frequently arise in triangular relating.

The woman's moral position, reports Gilligan, tends to revolve around an ideal of care as an ethic and activity of relationship. Hers is a position of seeing and responding to human need, of taking care of others in the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is hurt or left alone. The image of a hierarchy of guiding ethical principles of right and wrong tends to characterize male morality. His moral position revolves around seeing, judging, and acting on the basis of the best standard of equality and fairness for all.

In studying our fear of failure and fear of success reflexes in our triangular relationships and the limiting or inhibiting effects of third parties and influences, these gendered aspects of morality are likely to emerge as qualities to be continuously negotiated in the triangle—regardless of the gender of the participants. Consider your own moral values as they arise in your triangular relationships? What are your views and your feelings? What

moral values and position do others in your emotional triangles hold? What part of your BMR connection becomes quickly affected when you think of how your moral values harmonize or conflict with others in some of your emotionally significant triangular relationships?

Making Contact With your BMR connection

Think of someone with whom you have a significant relationship and in which there is an important third-party emotional involvement that you both take into account in your relationship. The classic triangle is mother, father, and me—but a universe of possible triangles branches out from there.

Perhaps you think of your relationship partner and his or her child with whom there is significant triangular relatedness that you both experience. Perhaps it is your own child or children that you experience as competing for attention with your relatedness partner. Perhaps it is your partner's mother who provides a significant emotional triangle, or your partner's father. Maybe

there is a boss, a business partner, or a business or profession that constitutes a viable third party in your relationship. Sometimes the competing third is an allegiance to a personal value system, a religious orientation, a political platform, or an alternative life style.

I will next ask you to dwell for a moment on the complications of emotionally significant three-way relationships in your life and to consider your fears of failure and success in the context of all of your triangular relationships. I will ask you to consider carefully how you relate in four areas of your life: (1) your work, (2) your social relationships, (3) your intimacy, and (4) your sexuality. You may wish to jot your ideas down as we go, specifying how each triangle works in your life.

1. Work: Whether you run a company or run a household, whether you take care of clients or students, or you care for your own small children, focus on how you feel about what you do on the job every day. In what ways do you feel a failure? Do you fear being—or being found

out to be—a failure, a phony, or a fraud? Are you afraid of not being as good as others in your workplace? Are you afraid to be too good? Do you fear standing out as special or accomplished in your work? Do you undermine yourself just as you are about to attain success?

2. Social Relationships: Do you find yourself competing with others? Are you competing with a true competitor or with all other men or all other women? Or are you competing with an internalized image of what you “should” do and be? Or with something your parents wanted for you, or a way your family or society wants you to be? How do your fears of failure show up differently in different social triangles? What are the ways that you feel powerless or out of control in emotional triangles? How does your fear of social success show up for you? Are your competencies likely to be experienced as threatening to others or to endanger you in some way?

3. Intimacy: What are your fears of failing or losing out in your intimate relationships? Do you undermine yourself? How do you cut off or emotionally distance yourself from other people when things get too close? Do your methods of minimizing yourself indicate a fear of losing? Or do they reflect a fear of succeeding? Do you use affairs or multiple lovers as a protection against the vulnerability and potential pain of intimacy? Do you emotionally pull out just when you are about to get what you thought you wanted and deserved? If you succeed in intimacy, who will be hurt or left out? What will be the fallout for you?

4. Sexuality: What are your fears in regard to failure and success in sexuality? How do you see yourself as a sexual being? Do you fear being sexually inadequate, unattractive, or unwanted? In what ways do you minimize or avoid sexual feelings and involvements? Who are your sexual competitors? When you are aware of diminished

sexual interest, arousal, or activity, how do you relate to yourself and to your past and present partners? Do you use third parties or outside involvements as excuses for maintaining blindness or deadness to your sexual impulses—thirds such as competitors, preoccupations, work pressures, social obligations, children, moral authorities, or parents?

As you considered each of these four areas of triangular emotional relationships what came up for you in your BMR connection. What sensations, words and images came up for you as clues to how your fear of failure and fear of success reflexes operate in your life?

Bringing the Fear of Failure and Success into Consciousness

Emotional triangles inevitably contain a desire to compete for love and a fear of being injured in competition for love. In my emotionally significant relationships I try to consider all possible

third parties operating in the background that silently influence the action in the foreground. I find it is important when considering possible triangular influences to include as third parties all values, social standards, customs, judgments, and morals—as well as people, real and imaginary—present, past, and future.

It may be useful and illuminating for you to actually diagram on a piece of paper the triangles in your life and to consider the emotional connections among each three. Based upon your reflections, you can write down your fears of failure and success related to each triangle. As you consider each triangle, your fear of failure or success may immediately be apparent...but it might also be quite hidden. Take time to consider all of the relationship issues carefully before concluding that you have no fears in any particular three-way relationship! As you are thinking do any sensations, words or images accompany your experiences of triangles?

In therapy people often need to re-experience the cooperative and competitive aspects of their original emotional triangle. It may

be illuminating for you to reflect on your own experience with your “original triangle,” the relationship between you, your mother, and father. Even though you may have grown up with a single parent, an absent father or mother certainly formed one part of an emotional triangle in your BMR connection. Or perhaps there was a step-parent or grandparent, a sibling or someone else who formed part of an important early triangle. As you reflect on each cooperative and competitive aspect of your original relationship triangles, what emotions emerge? Do you feel warmth, longing, and admiration? Or do you experience dread, contempt, hatred, disgust, or repulsion? What sensations, words and images, do you experience in your BMR connection as you consider your early triangles? Where exactly are there tensions and constrictions?

Given what you have just noticed about your original triangles, how do you notice similar sensations, words and images affecting current intimate relationships? How do your fears of failure and success show up differently in different relationships?

Doing the “Put on Your Aliveness Monitor” and “Touching Base with Your Body” exercises on a regular basis will give you interesting information about how triangular fear reflexes operate in your BMR connection.

7. The Fear of Being Fully Alive

Our expansiveness, creative energy and joy in our aliveness inevitably come into conflict with demands from family, work, religion, culture, and society. We come to believe that we must curtail our aliveness in order to be able to conform to the demands and expectations of the world we live in. We feel the world does not permit us to be fully, joyfully, and passionately alive. Rather than putting our whole selves out there with full energy and aliveness, we may throw in the towel, succumb to mediocre conformity, or fall into a living deadness.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Being Fully Alive is About

To say Marcie has too many things on her plate would be an understatement. She is a high-energy woman with a smile and a word of encouragement for everyone. When it's time to get something done, call Marcie. She'll spend half the night if necessary getting the award banquet table decorations ready. She never hesitates to do more than her share of driving in the kids' car pool and for after-school and weekend activities. If phone calls have to be made to remind people of a meeting or e-mails need to be sent out—you can count on Marcie. When a new president of the board is needed, there is Marcie—competent, ready, and available. When there are squabbles to be settled Marcie's the one who can handle things tactfully and effectively. “The trouble with me is I can't say no.”

Marcie certainly doesn't look lifeless. But she pays a heavy price for giving her all to each group adventure she is a part of, for not guarding her personal boundaries more carefully from social intrusions, for not valuing her inner life more than group

expectations, and for not treasuring her intimate relationships more dearly.

In my years of being Marcie's therapist I can only remember once her telling of a day she fixed herself a tuna sandwich and took a great book into her back yard and had a perfectly delicious afternoon by herself reading, enjoying the spring breezes and gentle sunshine in her garden.

Marcie grew up in a large family in a northwest farming community. From as early as she can remember everyone relied on her to get things moving, to make things happen, to organize the chores, to cheer everyone up. Exactly when her father's alcoholism began to insert itself insidiously into family life isn't quite clear. But it was Marcie's job to manage him, to protect the others from his abuses, to see that he got to bed safely. Where was mother all this time?

Needless to say, Marcie was always the class president, the athletic team captain, the yearbook editor. In high school and college she graduated with high honors. She met Nathan, her

husband, at a college weekend get-together, but since they were each committed to different graduate school programs in nearby states their early years together were spent weekend commuting.

Children came along, but because Nathan's job required him be on the road much of the time, the weekend marital intimacy and family life has continued indefinitely.

Every circumstance in Marcie's life requires her to wear another hat—and she wears them all well. She has learned how to fit in well at church, at the kids' schools, in her profession, in the neighborhood, in the community, in her husband's company group and among their set of close friends. Whatever the demand Marcie finds some way to rise to the occasion. Most of the time Marcie feels energetic and well—though she spends a lot of time at her shrink's and her chiropractor's offices. Otherwise everything with Marcie is great!

What's wrong with this picture? Marcie simply isn't fully alive to herself. Living for her own pleasure and satisfaction with her own desires, hopes and goals is somehow forbidden by her fear

of being fully alive reflexes. She has no right to a fulfilling life of her own.

How the Fear of Being Fully Alive Forms in Childhood

From our earliest years our energy, creativity, expansiveness, and joy in relationships inevitably comes into conflict with demands from family, work, religion, culture, and society. We come to believe that we must curtail our aliveness in our relationships in order to be able to conform to the expectations of the social world we live in. The fear of being fully alive is a fear associated with group life.

We might think of group life as a complex series of overlapping triangular relationships. When in the previous section of this book we began defining our personal relationship triangles, we were able to see how our fear of failure and success reflexes live on in our BMR connections. In group life, the effects of our triangular fear reflexes are greatly magnified because so many triangles are operating simultaneously.

Reflex fears of being fully alive for oneself become established in young children as soon as they become involved in the groups their parents choose for them. In adolescence we have greater choices as to what groups we will become involved with. So we expect that we will gain a new sense of life and self-fulfillment from participation in the groups we choose. But we soon discover that all groups have credos, expectations, and standards that are inevitably at odds with some of our own beliefs, opinions, and standards. As we strive to participate and integrate ourselves into group life, earlier-learned relational fear reflexes appear in new and different forms in relation to people in the group and in relation to group life itself.

In adulthood we may no longer actually be dependent on specific individuals or groups for survival, but our deep-seated group relatedness fear reflexes continue silently to eliminate options for us and thus to limit us in various ways. We come to live as if the world does not permit us to be fully, joyfully, and passionately alive.

As a result of a lifetime of living in groups we have learned to be sensitive to the demands of the social world around us. The minute we come under the influence of any particular group, we are immediately aware of how people in this group talk, dress, think, and behave. Each group we encounter is identifiable by characteristic codes and beliefs—the standards of the group.

But no matter how much we may identify with the beliefs and standards of any group, we know that we are, in our own ways, different. We tend to suppress our individuality and to lie low when our opinions and beliefs are likely to be at odds with the group ideals.

All around us we can see the results of the massive social inhibitions in which we all unwittingly participate. Every day we see people moving through the world like zombies—hardly noticing that the sun is shining, that flowers are blooming, and that all of nature is singing! We can so easily forget that we are living, breathing beings with a capacity for love and happiness, joy and sorrow, anger and fear.

It is as if in our BMR connections we have somehow chosen to die before it is our time! It is as though we have become infected by the forms of living deadness we see in people all around us—whether it's in our eating, drinking, and working habits, or in our mindlessly watching television or surfing the net.

Where did all of this numbness, inhibition, and deadness come from? How can we focus on the ways we unwittingly allow lifelessness to take us in? How can we release the chronic constrictions that live on in our BMR connections? How can we release our fear of being fully alive reflexes?

In considering how we experience our fear of being fully alive reflexes in groups, it is important to realize that all of the other earlier-learned fear reflexes in our BMR connection get triggered in response to different aspects of group life. It is a serious mistake to think that the boredom, dreariness and lack of aliveness we so frequently experience is caused by outside social forces—as so many people honestly believe. Rather, we need to pay careful

attention to the subtleties of all of our fear reflexes to notice how they are being re-stimulated by group life.

Making Contact With Your BMR connection

Imagine that your Thanksgiving table is set. The candles are lit. Platters heaped with steaming food pour from the kitchen as the extended family and guests assemble for the Thanksgiving prayer and the carving of the bird. Shrieks are heard from the children eating in the kitchen, pets silently settle into their corners, and the conversation begins. It hardly strikes us at this moment that beneath the weeks of careful preparation, the anxieties of coordinating family plans, and the private anticipations about the day lie a thousand silent fears. And similar pageants await in the weeks beyond Thanksgiving as with eager anticipation and silent dread we prepare ourselves for the upcoming holiday season.

Yes, there is thankfulness. And yes, there is joy. But in the background lie the darkness, fear, dread, and depression that have always accompanied Winter solstice celebrations. How each of us

experiences the emotional pressures of these social events differs from occasion to occasion and from year to year. But none can deny that the bustle of the holidays, the pressures of large family gatherings, and the obligations of seasonal get-togethers are something of an ordeal.

But why, if we are so glad to be reunited with family and friends, does it have to be such a strain? And aren't these stressful holiday occasions simply exaggerated versions of the many social events we find ourselves participating in all the time? What is it that we so object to about being with people in groups? Why do we pacify or anesthetize ourselves with customs and rituals, with spending and giving, and with massive amounts of food and drink? What are we struggling with? What are we fleeing from? What exactly do we dread so much? What keeps us from being fully alive to ourselves and to those around us that we care about so much?

There must be many ways we could address these questions about our group life. But what we want to know is how our fear of

being fully alive reflexes operate silently in social situations to rob us of full enjoyment of ourselves, our friends, and our loved ones. Our task is to bring whatever keeps us from being fully energized, fully inspired, fully creative, and fully spontaneous and alive into focus in here-and-now relationships for continuous study.

Bringing the Fear of Being Fully Alive into Consciousness

As a therapist I am always on the alert for ways people's fear of being alive reflexes dampen their spirits, their energies, and their relationships. I may ask something like, "Doesn't it seem like with all of this busyness and concern about the children that you can't quite get a life for yourself?" Or, "I know corporate hierarchies are exasperating, but must you take this whole nightmare home with you?" Or, "caring for people certainly has its rewards, but don't you sometimes confuse a desire to be helpful with a certain sense of helplessness you have always felt?" Or, "I know it's painful to think that you yell at the kids over things that don't really matter. But doesn't your impatience with them simply

repeat your parents' impatience with you?—Can you not let this go?"

These kinds of questions point the way towards experiencing in sensations, words, and images your BMR connection. For example, in the burnt child story I told earlier Gayle's question to me about my history of being attacked and my "scared to death" dream opened an escape hatch to liberate me from a kind of living death that I had been experiencing since childhood. The fear of opposing my father, the fear of speaking my own piece, the fear of desiring recognition and the fear of desiring a sense of pleasure from my teaching experiences were all fear reflexes living on in my neck, my lower back and my throat—limiting my sense of being fully alive.

By Way of Review

Since our fear reflexes are heavily conditioned in early childhood they never totally leave us and can re-possess us at any moment. For this reason it is important that we cultivate an

attitude of ongoing mindfulness of our body-mind-relationship self and to learn ways of releasing fear constrictions as they arise in the course of daily living. The “Put on Your Aliveness Monitor” and “Touching Base with Your Body” exercises have been devised to aid you in developing increased mindfulness.

At the end of considering all of the Seven Deadly Fears ask yourself now:

- Have I learned to monitor all parts of my body on a continuous basis so I can detect fear reflexes as soon as they crop up?
- Am I ready on a moment's notice to stop whatever I am doing, touch base with my body, and release the constricting reflexes almost as fast as they arrive.
- Am I convinced that taking myself and my life seriously is worthwhile?
- Am I truly committed to becoming more fully alive?

Chapter Nine

We Are the Intimate Species

In the decade following the 9/11 disaster I have worked with hundreds of therapists nationwide organizing these ideas about our seven body-mind-relationship fears. During that same time period stunning new technologies have taught us more about human nature than we have known since the beginning of time. We now know that we are nature's first experiment in emotional intimacy. Human babies are born desiring and searching for intimate emotional exchanges with their caregivers from the get-go. Brain scans reveal that our brains actually organize themselves according to the relationship opportunities available during the first two years of life. Further, the unique prefrontal cortex of the human brain has been found to be directly connected to our heart and is known to guide the structuring of the rest of the brain in accordance with the emotional messages infants give and receive from their caregivers.

However, neuropsychology shows that traumatic fear of any kind intrudes into the developing relational life of infants leaving deep neurological scars that profoundly affect later development.² That is, whenever we are frightened by relational experiences the pathways open at that moment constrict in order to alert us to avoid those kinds of relationship situations in the future. I have called these shutdown effects that develop in response to fear and pain “fear reflexes.” It is as if a sign were posted on channels of personal connections to other people that have been frightening or hurtful—“Never reach that way again.”

All infants, toddlers, and older children and adolescents experience body-mind fears arising from certain kinds relationship situations. In this book I have identified seven universal relational fears. Couples, by having a basic map of these universal relational

²See Schore, A. (2007). Review of *Awakening the Dreamer: Clinical Journeys*

by Philip M. Bromberg. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*: 17(5): 753-767 and

Porges, S. W. (2004). Neuroception: A Subconscious System for Detecting Threats and Safety. *Zero to Three*, 5:19-23.

fears, have the possibility of studying how each of the seven fears operates for each of them as the relationship itself develops. By studying fear reflexes together in the context of the developing relationship, partners can work toward regaining access to those closed off channels of love that were genetically designed for intimate emotional resonance but that have been closed off due to relational fears. In my book *Making Love Last: Creating and Maintaining Intimacy in Long-term Relationships* I review the extensive research that makes clear that we are indeed the intimate species and that we possess untold relational and sexual possibilities if we can but release the deadly constricting effects of our seven learned relational fears.

Hopefully you have found the definitions of the Seven Deadly Fears helpful and have already begun applying them to yourself and your relationships.

Hopefully you have been encouraged by the many stories in this book about how other people have successfully contacted their

BMR connections and learned how to release their life-long fear reflexes.

Hopefully you have begun to consider in new ways exactly how frightening relationships in your past live on to threaten your health and wellbeing in the present and future. What remains for you to do is to take the next steps on your own!

- You can increase your daily mindfulness of your BMR connections by “Putting on Your Aliveness Monitor” each morning and “Touching Base with Your Body” whenever you are feeling tense throughout the day.
- You can add to your body experiences through yoga, massage, or any other kind of body focus activities or therapy that feels good to you and helps you contact your fear reflex constrictions.
- You can add to your mental awareness experiences through meditation, counseling, or other kinds of individual or group psychotherapy or self-focus activity

that helps you experience your fear reflexes in here-and-now relationships.

- You and your relationship partner can study the seven deadly fears together and begin an ongoing process of noting when and how each fear shows up in your body-mind-relationship connection.
- Then trust your wellness instincts to tell you what to do next in order to be more fully alive and to experience your body-mind-relationship connections more fully!

Appendix A

Disclaimer: How to Locate a Counselor or Therapist!

Occasionally people have mental or physical reactions to self-help exercises and feel upset or confused. Or they experience anxiety or associations from the past that are frightening. Should this happen to you I recommend that you contact someone who can be of help to you. You can contact your physician, pastor, or rabbi, or you may wish to seek out a professional therapist or counselor near you who is listed in the yellow pages or online.

Appendix B

A Note for Psychotherapists:

Character Types, Relationships, and The Seven Deadly Fears

Psychological classifications serve many purposes. The Seven Deadly Fears are conceptualized as arising from seven kinds of relationship situations which all people experience to a greater or lesser extent in the course of growing up. When listening to another person talk about him/or herself, it can be extremely helpful to organize one's thoughts and therapeutic inquiry around these seven nodal points of relationship development. This is because each distinct type of relationship fear can be thought to resist therapeutic analysis in characteristic ways, to function differently in the ongoing structuring of each person's body-self, and to manifest differently in each person's significant relationships—including the psychotherapeutic relationship. Additionally, since all people everywhere have experienced these generic relationship challenges in one way or another, this way of forming overall listening perspectives is essentially culture-, race-

and class-free. Of course, the specific ways each person experiences each fear is specifically constructed by their cultural, familial and personal backgrounds.

The schema suggested in the *Overcoming Relationship Fears Workbook* for considering and contacting one's fears might well serve as a psychoanalytic-bioenergetic classification of character dynamics of the kind first called for by Otto Fenichel.³ Karl Abraham developed three character types: The oral, the anal, and the genital.⁴ Sigmund Freud classified character types as erotic, narcissistic, and obsessional.⁵ Wilhelm Reich's study of character was less theoretical and more based on practical problems

³ Fenichel, Otto. *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. New York: Norton, p. 525, 1945.

⁴ Abraham, Karl. (1921) "Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character;" (1924) "The Influence of Oral Erotism on Character Formation;" and (1925) "Character Formation on the Genital Level of the Libido." In *Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis I*. New York: Basic Books, 1953.

⁵ Freud, S. (1931). "Libidinal Types." *Collected Papers V*. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.

encountered in developing psychoanalytic technique.⁶ Rather than focusing on types of libidinal organization or on specific traits, Reich formulated character in terms of (1) its role in resisting analytic interpretation and (2) its relation to function in the libido economy of the organism. Reich's types are based on "characteristic behavior of the patient in defending himself against analytic insight and unconscious material."⁷

Alexander Lowen, on the basis of bioenergetic considerations, in 1958 wrote, "In the growth and development of the ego structure the child is subject to three major kinds of disturbance, each of which will leave its characteristic mark on his personality. Deprivation leads to orality, suppression to masochism, and frustration to rigidity."⁸ Lowen's three original character types

⁶ Reich, Wilhelm. (1933). *Character Analysis*. New York: Orgone Institute Press, Third Edition, 1949.

⁷ Wolfe, T. (1949). Translator's preface to the second edition, in Wilhelm Reich, *Character Analysis* (ed. 3), New York: The Orgone Institute.

⁸ Lowen, Alexander. *The Language of the Body*. New York: Collier Books, p. 154, 1958.

correspond roughly to Abraham's oral, anal, and genital types, but more closely to Freud's erotic, narcissistic, and obsessional types. Lowen later added the schizoid and psychopathic character types.⁹ Lowen subsequently elaborated a series of variations on bioenergetic character types, specifying that these types need not be thought of as existing in pure form in any particular individual, but rather in varying combinations depending on the person's childhood experiences. He asks, "Is it possible to arrange the different character types schematically so that we have a broad picture of the essential neurotic disturbances? Such an arrangement presupposes a relationship between the character types and some developmental patterns. Is it possible then to formulate a genetic-dynamic theory of character formation which would serve as such a pattern?"¹⁰

⁹Lowen, A. *Betrayal of the Body*. NY: MacMillan, 1967.

Bioenergetics. NY: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1975.

¹⁰ Lowen, A. *Ibid.*, p 140.

The Seven Deadly Fears delineated in this book expand the Lowenian understanding that relationship disturbances in early childhood leave characteristic marks on each body and personality. The basic schema for the *Seven Deadly Fears* is derived from psychoanalytic object relations theory as spelled out by many writers including Margaret Mahler (1968), Otto Kernberg (1976), and self-psychology as formulated by Heinz Kohut (1971) and others.

In a comprehensive review of contemporary psychoanalytic approaches I have elaborated four ways of attending to others in my book *Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy* (1983, 2003) and subsequent paper, “Listening Perspectives for Emotional Memories” (2005). The four perspectives are the backbone of the present schema of Seven Deadly Fears. The fears of (1) being fully alive and of (2) connecting are addressed by (I) Organizing Listening Perspective. The fears of (3) abandonment and (4) self-assertion are covered in (II) The Symbiosis/separation-individuation Listening Perspective. The fear of (4) not being

recognized corresponds to (III) The Selfobject Listening Perspective. The fear of (5) failure and success and the fear of (7) being fully alive are included in (IV) The Oedipal Listening Perspective.

The Seven Deadly Fears can be thought of as disturbances of childhood in the Lowenian sense in that they set up characteristic blocks to spontaneous, creative, and vibrant living and loving. Each of these character blocks can be thought of as intimately linked with body function and structure at various developmental levels in the same manner that Lowen has demonstrated in his extensive work on character types. Each set of character blocks generated by childhood fear can also be expected to manifest in relationships—especially the psychotherapeutic one—as resistance to relating in a fully alive manner in the "here-and-now" of the present moment.

Seven Deadly Fears thus outlines not only seven distinctly different kinds of fears produced by different kinds of childhood relationship situations. This book also provides a broad

dynamically based schema for understanding and classifying character. It parallels the penetrating and comprehensive work on character styles done by Steven Johnson.¹¹ Each general fear is assumed to be specifically tied to certain kinds of misattuned environmental responsiveness to the child's changing developmental capacities and needs at different stages of development.

The crucial technical implication in conceptualizing seven developmental levels of fear-based character formations is that optimal listening in psychotherapy then requires that we respond to each developmental level with different ways of understanding the transference, the resistance, and the countertransference. See my *Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy* for an extended summary of the listening perspective approach, its philosophical and epistemological underpinnings, its technical applications and an updated introduction including the contemporary relational perspective that is included in the twentieth anniversary edition

¹¹ Johnson, Stephen. (1994) Character Styles.

(2003). See my *In Search of the Lost Mother of Infancy* for an overview of the Listening Perspectives approach and specific applications to the earliest developmental issues and fears.

Appendix C

A Word on Mind-body Exercises

The exercises suggested in this book and in the follow-up *Overcoming Relationship Fears Workbook* are derived from the work of a number of body psychotherapists, but chiefly from Alexander Lowen, a pioneer in mind-body therapy who recognizes that to reduce fear and conflict a person must work with the body as well as the mind.¹² This is because beginning at the earliest age, our feeling responses to frightening or painful experiences became locked inside our physical selves. Then it was too dangerous, not allowed, or not otherwise possible to cry, scream, or rage. So these unexpressed feelings remain held in the body by chronic muscular tension patterns. As long as our feelings are trapped in our bodies we are stuck in self-protective behavior—our fear reflexes. We cannot experience deep psychological change even though we may have insight and awareness regarding what our patterns of chronic

¹² Lowen, A. (1975). *Bioenergetics*. New York: Penguin Books

contraction are about without also experiencing changes in our bodies.

Bioenergetic Analysis, a psychodynamic psychotherapy founded by Lowen, works with these chronic contractions in the body as well as with the issues and experiences which have created them. For body psychotherapists of any orientation the tension patterns in the body provide an essential key to understanding the client's problems. In the Bioenergetic therapy process the Bioenergetic exercises are utilized to help the person experience feelings, to express them, and to release them while understanding and integrating their meaning within the therapeutic relationship. This allows for change to take place on deep psychological as well as biological levels. The Bioenergetic-styled exercises suggested in this book can help you begin the process of connecting to your body and to your feelings. They provide a way to begin to release the long-held tension patterns, which operate destructively in your life.

Bioenergetics is one of nearly forty different schools of body psychotherapy practiced worldwide but the one with which I have the greatest familiarity. For more information contact The United States Body Psychotherapy Association.

Acknowledgements

Many people have generously given their time and help in developing this book. I owe a debt of gratitude to Virginia Wink Hilton for her many contributions to the early development of this work including most of the Bioenergetic exercises. Robert Hilton gave deeply appreciated support and some helpful clinical examples. Thanks to Don Gerard, Hal Zina Bennett, Gregory Moore, Judy Cohen, and John Nelson for expertise in editing and to Patti Wallace for the original artwork. Appreciation goes to Gerardo Arechiga and Gerardo Avalos for manuscript production and to Ray Calabrese for administrative backup. My daughter, Breta Hedges has always been my best fan who critiques and edits tirelessly.

To the many students, faculty, and colleagues at the California Graduate Institute, the Newport Psychoanalytic Institute, the Southern California Bioenergetics Institute, The Listening

Perspectives Study Center and the university of California Irvine Medical School Psychiatry Department who have read the manuscript, done the exercises, and offered helpful suggestions, I give heartfelt thanks. Friends and colleagues who have offered their personal support and professional expertise are:

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Stephen Johnson | Mary Walker | Linda Holley-Sobzak |
| Christine Bates | Mike Kogutek | Scott Baum |
| Pat Koos | Judith Bell | Christal Lee |
| Breta Hedges | Marcie Bell | Martha Stark |
| Jeanne Lichman | Patricia Miya | Suzanne Buchanan |
| Christine Panik | Beth Bynon | Pat Pearson |
| John Carter | Linda Barnhurst | Jack Platt |
| Doug Citro | Nancy Polites | Jolyn Davidson |
| Art Reynolds | Barbara Davis | Byron Rynolds |
| Arlene Dorius | Howard Rogers | Gary Dylewski |
| Cheryl Graybill | Phil Sutherland | Marijane Ward |
| Doug Citro | Marlene Laping | Cathearine Jenkins-Hall |
| John Hoffman | Kim Newhausen | Gayle Trenberth |
| Robert Whitcomb | Barbara Amon | Daniel Uribe |
| Jeff Schweiger | Laura Caghan | Laura Haynes |

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Sean Stewart | Joyce Tessier | Caron Harrang |
| Carol Ann Way | Masaru Horikoshi | Rebecca Wink |
| Jane Jackson | Don Winslow | Steve Johnson |
| Cinthia Wygal | Colleen Jorde | Collen Yoder |
| Gurucharan Khalsa | Randy Windle | Corrine Rupert |
| Hal Zina Bennett | Marty Klein | Vena Blanchard |
| Virginia Hunter | Vincentia Schroeder | Barbara English |
| Andrew Schwartz | Ellie Freedman | Audrey Seaton-Bacon |
| Mary Gillett | Sean Stewart | Judy Goodman |
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