

Finding Peace and pleasure through intimacy

By Ben Roe with assistance from Maggie Roe

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My Introduction: Meeting My Intimate Partner

Those who know me know I like ice cream, so if you ask me to join you for a malt (or shake, these days), I'm 99% likely to say "yes."

When I was a sophomore in college, my roommate asked me to escort his girlfriend to a play he was directing. After the play, I was unceremoniously relieved of my duties to this cute girl. Then my roommate and his girlfriend invited me and the girl who had been the script supervisor for the play to Harold's Place just off campus for a malt. We both accepted. Things went well and I was stricken. I invited her out every night that week as we were due to all head home for Christmas break at the end of the week—and she accepted!

I later learned that she had noticed me walking across campus and asked a friend who that was. It turned out that friend was my sister, who told her who I was. She said she found my walk and me intriguing, and had a sense that this person would be important in her life!

So that's how I met my now long-time companion, best friend, and partner of almost 56 years. We married after we graduated.

We've talked about the assignment for me to speak to you about "finding peace and pleasure through intimacy," We came up with a list of ways we have built and maintained and even grown our intimate relationship over the years.

Defining Terms

One way to think of peace is the absence of conflict. I think a more realistic definition is that conflict and differences are creatively managed with resolution attained (and sometimes renegotiated over time).

Another type of peace is more spiritual: the state of being in harmony and in tune with oneself, with others, and with one's surroundings.

Pleasure can be illusive sometimes, but it usually involves enjoyment, good feelings, delight, joy, inspiration even.

Intimacy, it turns out, is a whole field of study. And, though we usually think of sexual intimacy, intimacy has several types.

One source MindBodyGreen identifies four types of intimacy in addition to sexual: Emotional, Intellectual, Experiential, and Spiritual. Wikipedia highlights four types as well:

Types of Intimacy

Physical intimacy involves "getting inside" someone's personal space: being close, snuggling, hugging, holding hands, kissing, and sexual activity.

Emotional intimacy involves trust as built over time, feelings of being "in love" which involves both biochemical and social dimensions, liking, and loving. Love itself has several types: passionate (eros), companionate (phileo), and sacrificial (agape). "Companionate" love involves

an authentic and enduring bond, a sense of mutual commitment, the profound feeling of mutual caring, feeling proud of a mate's accomplishments, and the satisfaction that comes from sharing goals and perspective. (Wikipedia)

Emotional intimacy “involves candid, authentic sharing of thoughts and feelings. It involves being able to tell each other your deepest fears, dreams, disappointments, and most complicated emotions, as well as feeling seen and understood when you do.” (BRG) Most of my thoughts are along these lines.

Experiential intimacy is just as it says: sharing experiences together: cooking, biking, exploring, concerts, trips, etc.

Cognitive intimacy involves sharing thoughts, ideas, opinions, similarities and differences. Talking and discussing without judgment or competition differing perspectives on these kinds of things can deepen relationships.

Spiritual intimacy involves sharing an awesome sight, such as a sunset or sunrise, the Grand Canyon, a solar eclipse, the Milky Way without light pollution, enjoyment of natural beauty, spiritual experiences and questions, life's purpose, worship and prayer together.

Building Intimacy

I will approach the topic today from the point of view of building intimacy with others. I say “building” because it takes some intentionality and focus to make deep, satisfying, and pleasurable closeness with another, and when one feels safe and secure in it, one can feel peace. By secure, by the way, I don't mean static, but dynamic, renewed regularly through the tasks of building the relationship of intimacy.

Intimacy with self

The first task of building intimacy is to start with oneself. It is hard to share meaningfully with another unless you know something about yourself: what you like, what you believe, what you value, what interests you, what you are passionate about, etc. This task starts at its most basic level at birth, of course, and continues throughout life as we grow and change. It's a task of discovery, exploration, and of building, enhancing, and revising.

Intimacy with self involves a number of areas.

Honoring and respecting oneself is learned from early caregivers: parents, uncles, aunts, and other important people in one's early life. But it can also be learned much later! From pre-K and other teachers to and including professors, and other role models such as pastors, Scout leaders, counselors and psychotherapists, etc.

Intimacy with self can include doing an inventory of oneself from any number of tests, tools, and reflection exercises. It's all a part of clarifying just who you are: likes, dislikes, values, enjoyable activities, spiritual and other beliefs, strengths, weaknesses, areas of life that one excels in and areas of growth, and limitations.

Being aware of and knowing one's feelings is very important. Certainly during growing up one must learn the rudiments of what feelings are, how to recognize them, and how one can alleviate them. This is often hard, given long-standing beliefs that identify some feelings with particular genders and role expectations. But knowing the full range of feelings and how to manage them is a key to full humanity. “Social-emotional learning” curricula have been developed by Yale University, summarized in the term “RULER”: **R**ecognize the emotions of oneself and others; **U**nderstand the causes and consequences of

emotions; **Label** the emotions with nuanced words; **Express** emotions appropriately to norms and context; **Regulate** emotions with helpful strategies.

It is important to view oneself realistically, which involves honesty, self-acceptance, and appreciation of what you can do and have done, what you plan, and who you are. Keeping aware of the self-talk we tend to give ourselves is important, and giving oneself positive self-talk and compliments can help build confidence and self-esteem.

We all experience loss of any number of people and things: less or reducing ability and/or function, friends, spouses, partners, and parents and even children to illness and death. That means the work of grieving is really important to explore all the losses related to any particular loss, to integrate, and eventually to come to appreciate the gift that the person or ability gave you.

Many of us have issues with how our body appears in the mirror and to other people. Doing some intentional focus on appreciating our bodies is very helpful to one's feeling of wellness as well as communicating what kind of touch feels good and what kind doesn't.

Enhancing one's sexual response can involve what is called "Kegel" exercises. These are ways to strengthen the muscles in the pelvic floor and enhance sensation. They also can help with urinary control, and for women, childbirth.

All of these things can help maintain and increase self-knowledge, self-esteem, and integration of the self. And by the way, if you need help in this self-exploration, I think it is OK to ask a trusted friend or partner for help and feedback.

Intimacy with another

It is clear from millennia of human life that we humans are social creatures, that we develop and live best in community. Building relationships with others takes work, time, intentionality, and commitment--at the very least to honor and respect the other, ideally as an equal, and as a person worthy of your curiosity and interest.

So the first thing to remember is that this other is different from oneself in ways immediately obvious and ways hidden from view, sometimes even from awareness. That's where interest and curiosity come in: who is this other? What do they like? What is their life experience so far? What are their dreams, plans, hopes? Staying curious and alert to new discoveries—and talking about them—enriches the relationship and helps it grow.

Expressing appreciation: in thinking about this other person, what do you appreciate about them? Say so out loud and often!

Honesty: Committing oneself to honesty in what is said to one's friend and partner is crucial to building intimacy. As I said above, honesty with oneself is foundational.

Trust: Over time and with consistent and reliable responses trust is built. It doesn't (and perhaps even shouldn't) happen without the test of time and experience with the person.

Sharing experiences, especially ones with strong feeling intensity, can build closeness. Then sharing reactions afterwards can deepen the relationship. Regular contact and "checking in" enable each person to stay current with information and interests and reactions, and to stay close.

Differences and conflict are inevitable. Creatively managing conflict in a spirit of mutual caring and honest sharing can help resolve the issue and deepen intimacy.

Clarity of communication is key in conflict, but also in everyday interactions. This is one of the most important areas for building relationships.

- Active Listening is the discipline of listening carefully and with curiosity for what the other is saying. Nodding, and other non-verbal voicing (um, uh-huh, mmm sometimes with a little upward pitch at the end, as if asking for more). If necessary, even say, “tell me more” or “say more.” Reflecting back to the other what you heard them say can help keep the flow clear. There are 6 skills which comprise this way of communicating: Pay Attention, Withhold Judgment, Reflect/Think, Clarify, Summarize, Share.
- I-statements indicate you are taking responsibility for what you are saying: such as, “From my understanding of what I hear you saying, I think [this] or [that].”
- Sharing Feelings is important, if you are aware of what they are and can find the best words to explain them. The exercises in the intimacy with self above are really helpful. It’s OK just to say something like, “I need some time to think about this and sort out my feelings.”
- In the physical intimacy of sexual expression, it is helpful to follow the rule of “enthusiastic consent.” Related to this is a rule that it is OK to say “stop” or ask for a pause at any point in the encounter, or ask for something different. And then debrief the experience.

Discussing and clarifying goals, agreements, and covenants (including marriage vows and/or other promises made to each other) help keep the partners focused on the relationship and plans as they unfold and/or change. Honoring those promises and covenants strengthens the bonds of friendship and relationship. Constant renegotiation of agreements and covenants in light of changing realities and situations enables growing, maturing, and enduring relationships.

Sharing stories is an important way of deepening understanding and building a relationship. These can be stories about your family, or something you did that helps explain how you came to be who you are. It can be about how you felt at a concert, an event at the grocery store, or at a meeting or class, keeping in mind any guidelines of the group or work about confidentiality.

Secrets: when (if ever) is it OK to keep secrets from one’s intimate partner? If information is covered by a confidentiality policy, then it would seem to be OK. If it’s involving feelings for another person, I think it needs to be shared and talked about honestly.

Some years ago I attended a training on customer service. The one thing I remember most clearly is the importance of surprising and delighting the customer. I thought that would be a good thing to apply in my own intimate relationship: Surprise & delight my partner! It’s been a positive part of our relationship ever since. Related to this, spontaneity and anticipation and venturing together into new areas of experience helps relationships thrive. Saying “I love you” any time can surprise and delight!

Another thing we have found is gentle humor (never mocking, making fun of or belittling!). A turn of word or phrase, a pun, even saying the same thing back but in a different inflection—all of these can surprise and delight both.

Please and thank you may seem only surface politeness, but they are a way of reflecting one's respect of the other and of the relationship. Similarly, statements of gratitude (to my mind an appreciation that is deeper than just "thank you") help to build mutual appreciation.

Compliments are also in this same category, where they may seem insincere or just polite, but said genuinely and not overdone, compliments can keep relationships "oiled" and free.

Positive Reframing: Occasionally, someone will have a hard experience that leaves them doubting themselves or putting themselves down. After listening actively, carefully, and empathetically, it sometimes helps to re-frame a situation in a positive way. "It sounds like you represented yourself well," or, "you learned some important things."

Another influence is to focus on the positive: one of the lines from the BBC TV series "Death in Paradise" is an "ah-ha" moment for a detective who has a hard time expressing himself. His coworker asks him if he's heard about the wolves? One wolf is unsure, angry, mean, destructive, and the other is loving, optimistic, and positive. Asked which one gets stronger, the answer is "the one you feed."

Finally, accountability and self-direction are important, as is freedom from judgment and "monitoring."

Intimacy with the community is to encourage story-sharing and sharing convictions and beliefs, listening respectfully and actively, and sharing one's own story, convictions and beliefs with respect.

Some links and books on intimacy

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intimate_relationship A rich source of historical and academic information, well-footnoted, with links to many related terms.

<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/types-of-intimacy-besides-sex>

<https://www.ycei.org/ruler>

<https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/> A one-stop shop for information (Canada)

<https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/facts/pleasure/>

The biggest sex organ is not between the legs.

<https://www.healthline.com/health/intimacy> A health-related perspective.

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/10-ways-rekindle-passion-marriage/>

“A good sexual relationship is built on emotional intimacy and closeness.”

15 Books All Couples Should Read, According To Marriage Therapists

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/relationship-books-recommended-marriage-therapists_15d5dc3c5e4b0b59d256ee097

- *The Art of Loving*. Erich Fromm (online PDF)
<https://farzad.devbro.com/the%20art%20of%20loving.pdf>
- *Mating In Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence*. Esther Perel
- *The Normal Heart: The Surprising Secrets of Happy Couples and What They Reveal About Creating a New Normal in Your Relationship*. Chrisanna Northrup, Pepper Schwartz, James Witte.
- *Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find -- And Keep -- Love*. Amir Levine and Rachel S.F. Heller.
- *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*. Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt.
- *How to Make Love All the Time*. Barbara De Angelis.
- *The New Rules of Marriage: What You Need to Know to Make Love Work*. Terrence Real.
- *The ADHD Effect on Marriage; Understand and Rebuild Your Relationship in Six Steps*. Melissa Orlov.
- *Conscious Loving: The Journey to Co-Commitment*. Gay Hendricks and Kathlyn Hendricks.
- *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*. Gary Chapman.
- *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. Sue Johnson.
- *Marriage Meetings for Lasting Love*. Marcia Naomi Berger.
- *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes Are High*. Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler.
- *Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy For Dummies*. Brent Bradley, James Furrow.
- *The Seven Principles For Making Marriage Work*. John M. Gottman and Nan Silver.

The Dance of Intimacy; A Woman's Guide to Courageous Acts of Change in Key Relationships, by Harriet Lerner. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

The Intimate Marriage. Howard and Charlotte Clinebell. (online PDF)

<http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-2/Religion-Online.org%20Books/Clinebell%2C%20Howard%20J.%20%26%20Clinebell%2C%20Charlotte%20H.%20-%20The%20Intimat.pdf>

Finding Peace and pleasure through intimacy (summary)

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- Peace: the state of being in harmony and in tune with self, others, and surroundings.
- Pleasure involves enjoyment, good feelings, delight, joy, inspiration.
- Intimacy types. Emotional, Emotional, Intellectual or Cognitive, Experiential, and Spiritual.
- **Physical intimacy** involves being close, snuggling, hugging, holding hands, kissing, and sexual activity.
- **Emotional intimacy** involves trust, liking, and loving. Love itself has several types: passionate (eros), companionate (phileo), and sacrificial (agape). It involves candid, authentic sharing of thoughts and feelings, around deepest fears, dreams, disappointments, and most complicated emotions.
- **Experiential intimacy** is sharing experiences together: cooking, biking, exploring, concerts, trips.
- **Cognitive intimacy** involves sharing thoughts, ideas, opinions, similarities and differences.
- **Spiritual intimacy** involves sharing awesome and sometimes transcendent experiences.
- Intimacy takes intentionality and focus to make deep, satisfying, and pleasurable closeness.

Intimacy with self

- Start with oneself: know about yourself, what you like, what you believe, what you value, what interests you, what you are passionate about, etc.
- Honoring and respecting yourself is basic.
- Intimacy with self can involve an inventory of yourself: clarifying just who you are: likes, dislikes, values, enjoyable activities, spiritual and other beliefs, strengths, weaknesses, areas of growth.
- Be aware of and know your feelings. “RULER”: **R**ecognize one’s own emotions and those of others; **U**nderstand the causes and consequences of emotions; **L**abel the emotions; **E**xpress emotions appropriately; **R**egulate emotions.
- View yourself realistically, with honesty, self-acceptance, and appreciation of what you can do and have done, what you plan, and who you are.
- Keep aware of self-talk, and give yourself positive self-talk and compliments.
- Recognize grieving of losses, integrate, and eventually to come to appreciate the gift in it.
- Intentionally focus on and appreciate your body.
- Enhance your sexual response with self-exploration and exercises.
- All of these help maintain and increase self-knowledge, self-esteem, and integration of the self. It is OK to ask a trusted friend or partner for help and feedback.

Intimacy with another

- We humans are social creatures; we develop and live best in community. Building relationships with others takes work, time, intentionality, and commitment, honoring and respecting the other, as an equal, and as a person worthy of your curiosity and interest.
- Watch for ways this other is different from yourself. Keep interest and curiosity: who is this other? What do they like? What is their life experience so far? What are their dreams, plans, hopes? Stay alert to new discoveries.
- Express appreciation: what do you appreciate about them? Say so out loud and often!
- Commit to honesty in what is said.
- Trust is built over time and with consistent and reliable responses.
- Share experiences, especially ones with strong feeling intensity, then share reactions afterwards.
- Stay in regular contact and “check in” to stay current with information and interests and reactions.
- Creatively manage conflict in a spirit of mutual caring and honest sharing.
- Clarity of communication is key.
- Active Listening is the discipline of listening carefully and with curiosity for what the other is saying. Pay Attention, Withhold Judgment, Reflect/Think, Clarify, Summarize, Share.
- I-statements take responsibility for what you are saying.
- Share feelings. It’s OK to take time to sort them out.
- In physical intimacy seek “enthusiastic consent.” Honor requests to “stop” or pause.
- Discuss and clarify goals, agreements, and covenants and renegotiate as needed.
- Share stories.
- Discuss when it is OK to keep secrets.
- Surprise & delight!
- Share gentle humor (never mocking, making fun of or belittling!).
- Please and thank you.
- Share gratitude and compliments.
- Positive Reframing.
- Feed the positive.
- Accountability and self-direction, free from judgment and “monitoring.”

Intimacy with the community is to encourage story-sharing and sharing convictions and beliefs, listening respectfully and actively, and sharing one’s own story, convictions and beliefs with respect.

Exercise Questions

1. What do you like about yourself? What do you like most to do? What accomplishments do you most treasure? What losses have you survived? What losses are you working through? What do you like about your personality? What do you like about your mind? What do you like about your body? Where do you most like to be touched? Consider doing this exercise:

<https://jbenjaminroe.com/jbr/2-uncategorised/345-body-image-exercise>

2. List all of the feeling words you can think of.

3. Write a love letter to yourself.

4. What do you most look forward to or to do? What plans are you making to do it?

5. What relationships do you most cherish? What about them made/make them special? Which are/were the most intimate? In what way(s)?

6. Tell your partner or special friend what you most appreciate about them.

7. Tell your partner or special friend a story about your life that you may not have told them before.

8. What's a conflict you have resolved? What did you learn? About yourself? About the other? Did something turn out to be key to resolution? Did you celebrate? How?