



*Love*  
**SEX** &  
MARRIAGE

WRITTEN BY

DR.K.SOHAIL & BETTE DAVIS

MBBS FRCP (C)

RN BN MN

AS SPECIAL LETTERS TO EACH OTHER

*Love*  
**SEX** &  
MARRIAGE

*Love*  
**SEX** &  
MARRIAGE

*Written by*

**DR.K.SOHAIL & BETTE DAVIS**  
MBBS FRCP (C)                      RN BN MN

White Knight Publications  
2004 Toronto, Canada

Copyright ©2005 by Dr. K Sohail and Bette Davis

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written consent of the writer or publisher, or a licence from The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency (Access Copyright). For an Access Copyright licence, visit [www.access-copyright.ca](http://www.access-copyright.ca) or call toll free to 1-800-893-5777.

Published in 2005 by White Knight Books,  
a division of Bill Belfontaine Ltd.  
Suite 103, One Benvenuto Place  
Toronto Ontario Canada M4V 2L1  
T. 416-925-6458 F. 416-925-4165  
E-mail [whitekn@istar.ca](mailto:whitekn@istar.ca) • website: [www.whiteknightpub.com](http://www.whiteknightpub.com)

### **Ordering information**

#### **Canada**

White Knight Book Distribution Services Ltd.  
c/o Georgetown Terminal Warehouses  
34 Armstrong Avenue  
Georgetown ON, L7G 4R9  
T: 905-873-2759 F: 905-873-6170  
E-mail: [orders@gtwcanada.com](mailto:orders@gtwcanada.com)

#### **USA**

Hushion House Publishing  
Services c/o APG Books  
1501 Country Hospital Road  
Nashville TN USA 37218  
T: 888-275-2606  
F: 800-510-3650

### **National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Sohail, K. (Khalid), 1952-      Davis, Bette 1952-  
Love, sex and marriage / K. Sohail / Bette Davis

ISBN 0-9730949-9-0

1. Love. 2. Marriage—Psychological aspects. 3. Man-woman relationships.

2. I. Title.

HQ519.S64 2004      158.2'4      C2003-901992-6

Cover and Text Design: Karen Petherick, *Intuitive Design International Ltd.*

Font: ITC Leawood

Cover images ©2004 Life Stock Photos

Printed and Bound in Canada

DEDICATED TO ...

*those men and women  
who bring out the best in each other*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Anne Henderson for her painstaking efforts in reviewing the manuscript and providing creative feedback, but most importantly for the gift of selfless friendship,

To Karen Petherick for her outstanding cover and text design,

To Bill Belfontaine, Publisher of White Knight Publications, for his unflagging commitment to this project and the generosity of his friendship and editorial wisdom,

To Adriana Davis, for her loving support and thoughtful feedback from a teenager's perspective.

Sohail and Bette

# CONTENTS

Introduction	A Loving Friendship.....	1
Chapter One	Celibacy .....	5
	Celibacy: A State of Limbo? .....	9
	Growing Alone, Growing Together.....	12
	Eastern / Western Couples .....	14
	Sexuality and Spirituality.....	16
	Celibacy and Sexual Abuse .....	18
Chapter Two	Dating .....	21
	Dating in Secrecy .....	26
	Gold or Gold Plated.....	29
	Dating on the Internet .....	32
Chapter Three	Marriage .....	35
	Marriage – Past, Present and Future.....	39
	The Pressure to Marry .....	42
	The Pressure to Stay Married .....	44
Chapter Four	Divorce .....	47
	Divorce – the Pains and the Lessons Learned ....	51
	Moving On.....	55
	Divorce and Recovery.....	57
Chapter Five	Family of the Heart .....	61
	Friends or Acquaintances.....	68
	Business and Loving Relationships .....	71
	Establishing Healthy Boundaries .....	74
Chapter Six	Extended Family.....	79
	Mothers, Fathers, Aunts and Uncles.....	83
Chapter Seven	Love and Sex Education	
	for the Next Generation.....	85
	Lessons in Love and Sexuality.....	96

Chapter Eight	Sexual Fantasies .....	105
	Sexual Fantasies in Therapy .....	111
Chapter Nine	The Dark Side of Love .....	113
	Jealous Lovers .....	120
	Unfaithful Spouses.....	123
	Prescriptions for Unfaithful Spouses .....	135
Chapter Ten	I / We People .....	141
	We or I .....	148
	Life Transitions.....	151
Chapter Eleven	Men and Women on the Highway of Liberation.....	153
	A Creative Friendship .....	164
	References .....	169
	About the Authors .....	170
	Publications from Dr. Sohail's Library .....	172
	A Message from the Publisher .....	173
	Books by White Knight Publications.....	174



## INTRODUCTION

### **A LOVING FRIENDSHIP**

This book is a series of letters that Bette Davis and I wrote to each other. To make them more meaningful, let me share with you some of the highlights of our loving friendship.

I met Bette in the late 1970s when I was a resident in psychiatry at Memorial University in St. John's Newfoundland. We worked together as co-therapists for a year in the same clinic. During that time we became not only good colleagues but also excellent friends. We had intellectually stimulating discussions about our professional, personal and philosophical lives. I was quite impressed by her enthusiasm to grow and broaden her existential horizons. While having serious discussions about our therapy sessions, we could also laugh a lot together.

When I asked Bette about the secret of our special friendship, she replied, "We keep a balance between our humorous and serious discussions." There was no doubt that we could communicate wonderfully together. Being brought up in the East, where having a friendship with a woman outside the family was taboo, it was a very enjoy-

able, warm and growth-promoting experience for me. After I graduated and moved on to New Brunswick, then Ontario, to work in different hospitals, we gradually lost contact.

In December 2001, when we met again, I was fascinated to discover that we had both developed so much personally and professionally and it was wonderful to see that we could still laugh together yet have serious discussions. We had changed so much but our friendship had changed so little.

One evening I presented a gift to Bette, a copy of my book, *From Islam to Secular Humanism ... A Philosophical Journey*, and shared with her that I wanted to write a book about the psychology of love, sex and marriage. I invited her to join me in that adventure and was thrilled when she readily agreed, as she had been contributing articles to professional journals for some time. I suggested we exchange ideas and insights about intimate relationships using an intimate form of letters. For the next few months, we not only exchanged e-mails regularly, but also had passionate discussions on the phone.

Letter writing can be a special form of creative expression that has become an integral part of my psychotherapeutic practice. My patients and I regularly exchange letters and both find it a valuable adjunct to discussions in therapy sessions. I wanted to further explore the benefits of letter writing with Bette. For me it was a symbol of a creative dialogue between two friends who belonged to different worlds:

- Professions. My observation is that many mental health professionals who work together cannot transcend their ideological and professional differences. It was therefore refreshing to work with Bette and look after our patients and their families together. We were a good

team and our patients respected us. Working together, we not only challenged but also learnt a lot from each other.

- **Cultures.** I was brought up in a conservative, traditional and religious family and culture of the East while Bette grew up in a liberal and secular culture of the West. Our differences were an inspiration to share more with each other. Respecting each other's values, philosophies and lifestyles was the first step in the evolution of our friendship.
- **Genders.** I met a number of women in my personal and professional life who were very angry with men. It was very difficult for me to have an open and honest dialogue with them, as they had suffered from a number of painful experiences with men. I was quite impressed that Bette and I could see the brighter side of our dark experiences. We both believed that crises can be opportunities to grow.

As we wrote to each other, it became obvious that we were communicating as:

- friends, sharing our experiences and philosophies about intimate relationships and the cycle of love;
- adults, who would like to offer love and sex education to the next generation and,
- therapists, who help suffering patients discover happy and healthy lifestyles.

Exchanging letters with Bette was symbolic of a long overdue dialogue between men and women. I believe that because of the social injustices over the centuries, invisible walls were erected between men and women making it

difficult to completely trust each other to become friends and lovers.

The time has come for us to discover a humanistic attitude towards relationships and transcend our class, ethnic, religious, gender, and cultural differences and prejudices. If we want to live in a peaceful and loving world, we need to open up an honest dialogue between men and women from different social, religious and cultural backgrounds seen so clearly in these letters. I hope they become as exciting and inspiring to read as they were for us to write.

Sohail

CHAPTER ONE

## CELIBACY

Dear Bette,

### IS CELIBACY NATURAL OR UNNATURAL?

Does it reflect emotional maturity or sexual deviation? The more I think about these questions, the more I realize that it depends upon whether people are celibate by choice or had it imposed upon them by their families and communities. Those who are celibate out of free choice find it quite natural, but for those upon whom it is imposed by their social circumstances, it leads to frustrations and resentments – even perversions.

There was a time in most traditional cultures that unmarried men and women were expected to remain celibate. That is why in French a single person is called *celibataire*. In modern Western societies single people may well be more sexually active than many married people who have become celibate because of loveless marriages.

When I think about the many men and women that I met or read about who led celibate lives, I found them to

occupy a wide spectrum. On one extreme were men and women who felt extremely frustrated when their sexual needs were not fulfilled. When they suppressed and repressed their sexual desires, urges and instincts, they experienced emotional problems. Some suffered from anxiety disorders while others developed neurotic behaviors. Many became unhappy and angry over a period of time.

On the other extreme were men and women who had successfully sublimated their sexual instincts and needs, they had a focus and a passion in their lives. Their commitment to their spirituality, creativity or serving humanity helped them discover peace in their own hearts and loving relationships with others, relationships that were affectionate but not sexual. When we study the lives of priests, nuns, mystics and artists who were celibate for decades, we discover that their dedication helped them transcend the temptations of ordinary people. Most succeed in their commitment, while some leave their convents or monasteries as they are unable to keep their vows of celibacy.

I have come to the realization that sexual instincts are different than hunger and thirst. If we do not eat food or drink water for a prolonged period of time we become physically and emotionally sick and may die. Because sexual instincts are more in our control, we can condition ourselves to live without sex and still be physically and emotionally healthy. But to be able to control our sexual instincts we need special discipline. Abraham Maslow had observed that self-actualized people could accept prolonged celibacy with no negative effect on their personalities and mental health.

I also encountered men and women who considered pre-marital sex a sin, so they remained celibate until they

got married. Some never dated because they preferred that their families and friends arrange their marriages. They believed love belonged after and not before marriage. I never agreed with their philosophy but I respected their ideology and lifestyle. I was impressed by their integrity and their strength of character as they were honest with themselves and faithful to their spouses. Their celibacy was also their own choice and not imposed by others.

In my personal life, I had realized that I had to choose between my creative and a family life. I discovered that commitment to my creativity was so strong that I could not accept the responsibility of family life. That is why I chose not to have children. I have come to a stage in my life where to lead a celibate life does not cause emotional stress. I enjoy my involvement in my literary and artistic projects and socializing with creative friends, who have become my family. Even in my relationship with women, I have discovered that my primary relationship is that of friendship. I have come to realize that the most precious, most honest and most genuine relationship between two human beings is friendship. Even between lovers and spouses, friendship is the cake and romance, sex and intimacy, the icing. When sex becomes the cake and friendship the icing, we find problems. That is why I respect and admire lovers and spouses who are also good friends.

I have also discovered that whenever I chose to be celibate, it provided me with a special opportunity to be alone, to spend extended periods of time with myself and to get to know myself intimately. That is why there were times when I prescribed celibacy to my clients in my clinical practice. Whenever I worked with men and women who were involved in extra-marital affairs and wanted to choose

between their spouses and lovers, I asked them to be celibate for 100 days. During that time I asked them not to sleep with anyone and to remain on their own. Prolonged celibacy helped them to do very necessary soul-searching. It was amazing how that period of celibacy helped them to think things through clearly and decide which relationship they wanted to pursue honestly, sincerely and whole-heartedly.

To conclude all I can say is that every human being is unique – for some people being alone and celibate can be a curse and for others a blessing.

I look forward to your comments about celibacy.

Affectionately,  
Sohail



## CELIBACY: A STATE OF LIMBO?

*Dear Sohail,*

*Your comments on celibacy are both interesting and rich with points that I am eager to elaborate upon. I agree that the ease with which celibacy is undertaken is often related to whether it is imposed upon people or they embrace it of their own choice. Certainly celibacy can be undertaken for healthy and unhealthy reasons and in healthy and unhealthy ways.*

*Traditionally, religious beliefs and cultural values have had a very strong influence on how we live our lives in general and how we establish intimate relationships. Some cultures and religions impose very strict rules with serious consequences for breaking those rules, while others accept an element of personal decision with regard to these matters.*

*In my clinical practice I too have seen people struggle with the limitations placed on the expression of their sexuality. Overall, the most challenging times that my clients have highlighted are those periods prior to marriage, between intimate relationships, or within a relationship that is having intimacy difficulties. They have expressed profound feelings of emotional distress, such as anxiety, guilt, and sometimes depression. The more dedicated the individual is to his/her cultural or religious beliefs, the more strict and unyielding the rules, the more distress they seem to experience.*

*Let's look at celibacy from the other perspective that you mentioned – that of personal choice. In this regard, I feel celibacy is a reflection of an individual's emotional health, which affects the health of their relationships. One's openness to a period of celibacy or even a celibate lifestyle appears to be influenced by how much individuals are driven by their needs*

*for physical closeness, emotional intimacy, belonging and nurturing. Admittedly, our sexually-hyped society doesn't help them to stay celibate.*

*I have observed that many people enter into a period of celibacy with a sense of dread, even viewing it as a symbol of failure or inadequacy. Often people see it as an unnecessary state of limbo, like the period that the trapeze artist experiences when flying unattached through the air from one set of hands to the other. For some people there is such a strong drive to connect to another person, to be in another person's arms, that there is a sense of incompleteness outside of a primary intimate relationship. They believe they must be in a relationship to be loved. For those people it seems celibacy is simply a non-event, just the space in-between two important events which needs to be kept as short as possible.*

*Many times these beliefs and needs are so strong that people become intimate prematurely, before they know their partner well enough, before they know if they are compatible – or if they really like the person.*

*Personally, I can remember viewing celibacy with a feeling of uneasiness; however recently I have been more able to embrace this experience as a time of productivity, contemplation and even cleansing. Recently, celibacy has provided me with time to feel my own feelings. I have realized how grounding, empowering and enjoyable that could be. Although I have a real respect for the negotiations that are part of decision-making in a relationship, I realized how wonderful it is to be accountable just to me for my decisions. This independence seemed to build my self-esteem and self-reliance.*

*Yet, Dear Friend, there is an aspect of the celibate lifestyle that still holds some puzzlement for me. I have wondered if celibacy is a state in which we are denied a certain dimension*

*of personal growth. Let me explain. As you know, I have a very strong commitment to personal growth and self-knowledge (probably one of the reasons that I was drawn into the area of mental health). And I share your regard for friendships as the primary relationship from which other levels such as intimacy develops. In fact I think that our friendships are the main way in which we grow. The people that we are privileged to be in a loving bond with, mirror our beauty and our shadow. Furthermore, I believe that that mirroring happens in all of our relationships but the relationships in which we are sexual have an added unique dimension. I strongly feel that a sexual connection between partners can be a deeply spiritual connection and a source of growth that is unparalleled.*

*And so I wonder if that depth of growth can be accomplished through other means. Or is it possible that when we are celibate we are denied that thread of growth that is then not a part of the complex tapestry of who we become?*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

## **GROWING ALONE, GROWING TOGETHER**

Dear Bette,

I am quite impressed by your observation that we as human beings grow in two different ways – we grow alone and we grow together. I think your concern, “I wonder if celibacy is a state in which we are denied a certain dimension of personal growth,” is quite valid. But I have also observed in my professional and social lives that there is an emotional price tag attached to growth inside an intimate relationship. To balance an intimate relationship both parties have to give up some aspects of their personal freedom. Some pay that price willingly and gracefully while others resent it. That is why I think an intimate relationship is like a three-legged race. Couples are happy only if they prefer to jog slowly together than run fast alone. If the faster partner is not patient, then they can trip and fall. I believe that couples who can balance their personal and relationship growth are indeed fortunate.

I have also observed that some couples experience celibacy inside an intimate relationship if one partner has to visit family in a different city, attend school far away from home, or are involved in a long distance romance. I have met a number of Eastern immigrant families in which the mother and children visit the extended family, while the father stays behind to earn a living. I sometimes wonder whether Eastern couples can tolerate prolonged separation for family reasons more comfortably than Western couples. Dealing with such separations and periodic celibacy is easier for couples who trust each other and have a well

established social support network. For some couples prolonged celibacy becomes so painful that it undermines the relationship to such an extent that it finally ends. Temporary separation leads to permanent separation.

Celibacy for people involved in an intimate relationship is different than single people. I have met couples who feel so secure in themselves that their separation does not hurt their relationship. Their frequent phone calls and emails keep the spark alive. One such lover said, "I know we love and adore each other. Even when we are not physically together we feel spiritually connected. Even thinking about him fills my heart with magical energy." And her sweetheart said, "I know she will never do anything that would hurt our relationship."

Such trust and faith and love can overcome many hurdles and crises including temporary separation and periodic celibacy. In some mysterious way it can even enhance intimacy as they never take each other for granted and always cherish their time together – more than those couples who always live together.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## EASTERN / WESTERN COUPLES

*Dear Sohail,*

*I liked the analogy of the three-legged race that you used to describe being in an intimate partnership. It is an accurate and creative representation of the kind of cooperation that is needed to sustain a successful and healthy union. It would seem that, through our discussion of the issues of personal growth whether accomplished while celibate or as part of a couple, we have recognized that there are benefits and costs that are uniquely associated with each path that is chosen. I was also interested in your comments on the acceptance of celibacy due to separation within an intimate relationship. When you and I have chatted as friends over the years I was always intrigued how often you mentioned that a person you knew from your Eastern culture had agreed to temporarily live separate from their partner.*

*Although it was often arranged for justifiable reasons – family illness, employment or education – I was surprised at the ease with which these separations were undertaken since often the span of time that people were apart or the distance seemed lengthy. You stated, “To tolerate such separations and experience periodic celibacy is easier for couples who trust each other and have a well established social support network.” I am in complete agreement with the idea that trust and social support help sustain periods of separation for couples and are, in fact, the foundation on which family life is built. And yet I wonder if the prohibitions with regard to divorce are also an influencing element to consider in this situation.*

*Finally, Dear Friend, I am curious about an issue that we touched upon while discussing celibacy and intimacy, that of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. I feel that a sexual connection between lovers can be a deep spiritual connection. What is your view? Can a sexual encounter between loving, committed partners also become spiritual?*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

## SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

Dear Bette,

You have asked me whether I see a connection between human sexuality and spirituality. I think it is a matter of personal interpretation and cultural conditioning. I have met people who grew up in the Catholic faith of the West, who believe that sex can lead people away from God. That is why many nuns and priests believe in chastity and practise celibacy for their spiritual growth and enlightenment. On the other hand I met people who grew up in the Tantric tradition of the East, who believe that human sexuality can be one way (if not the shortest way) to discover divinity. They think spiritual connection is an integral part of sexual connection, as they believe human beings are spiritual beings.

I believe people from different traditions, faiths, belief systems and lifestyles give different meanings to human sexuality. I was surprised to read that in some cultures women had to sleep with a priest to lose their virginity before they could get married. It appeared as if women had to sacrifice their virginity to God to obtain the blessing of the church.

Those who are not religious may also attach special meaning to their sexual encounters. Abraham Maslow reported that some self-actualized people believed that if they were part of a loving relationship then their sexuality developed a mystical dimension. Many enlightened lovers feel that “making love” is different than “screwing”, as making love enhances personal growth while screwing is just an expression of one’s animalistic desires with no



profound meaning attached to it. One spiritual lover said, “I make love to a special woman, not any woman, a woman of my dreams. It is divine.”

Animals have sex to reproduce. Many human beings do the same. But some people do not have sex only to reproduce, they also have sex to express their profound love and appreciation to their partners; in such cases sexual encounters also become spiritual encounters.

*From Islam to Secular Humanism ... A Philosophical Journey*, is a book in which I discuss in detail that for some people their spirituality is an integral part of their faith in God and their religious lifestyle, while for others spirituality is a part of humanity and has no relationship with any belief in God and religious ideology. I belong to the latter group.

Affectionately  
Sohail

## CELIBACY AND SEXUAL ABUSE

*Dear Sohail,*

*Your response to my question on the relationship between spirituality and sexuality was intriguing, particularly the multi-faceted discussion that included the religious perspective from two opposing views as well as the non-religious. Although your focus was primarily on how spirituality and sexuality can be united to enhance growth, you alluded to the darker side of this issue and I would like to elaborate on this component.*

*It seems that a number of religions have struggled to keep sexuality and spirituality separate. The belief that sexuality and spirituality did not have a place in the life of a religious person meant that many people who were drawn to the religious life were also committing to a sexless life. You commented that the sex drive is unlike other drives, such as hunger, in that it can be put into dormancy or redirected into other creative ventures, thus allowing the person to live an emotionally and physically healthy life. And although I agree it can be done, it is also evident that, in a number of religious organizations, it had not been done. The mishandling of this restriction on sexuality in religious communities has had dire consequences. We have watched for decades as the media and the courts have exposed the opportunistic advantage that was taken by mainly male religious leaders, priests and brothers, of children in their care.*

*I grew up in Newfoundland and saw the consequences first hand. It was a shock to the world in the 1980s when the news broke that the Christian Brothers at Mount Cashel Orphanage had sexually, emotionally and physically abused numerous boys for years. Sadly, it was not a shock to their*

*peers. When I talk to old school friends and acquaintances, we agree that we knew that the abuse was happening and we didn't keep it a secret. It was just not acknowledged in public.*

*It would appear that whether sexuality and spirituality are used to enhance growth and exchange deep loving feelings, or as a mechanism of power and abuse, it is an enormously strong combination which needs to be handled with knowledge and respect.*

*Warmly,  
Bette*



CHAPTER TWO

## DATING

Dear Bette,

One of the wonderful and romantic things that I discovered in the Western world is the tradition of dating. I gradually became aware that it exists in all those liberal cultures that believe in human freedom, where people are free to think independently, free to express their affection spontaneously. These are the cultures where young men and women are free to openly socialize with each other and free to choose their friends, lovers and spouses. They are the cultures, where families and communities respect and support romantic choices.

It is unfortunate that so many societies in this world remain conservative, religious and segregated. In such cultures dating is forbidden and free mixing of young men and women is considered immoral, unethical and sinful. Boys and girls attend separate schools and move in different social circles. Even today, their colleges and universities, where advanced learning is supposed to be paramount, are

segregated. Such traditions create a very unnatural social environment and most men and women never learn how to socialize with each other properly. When men and women want to meet each other, they have to do it secretly. They are continually worried that they might be found out and then face public humiliation and legal (religious law) consequences.

In some cultures if a couple is found holding hands, kissing or having a romantic relationship, they can be fined, put in jail, and in the most backward of places, even stoned to death. In such cultures arranged marriages are more respected than love marriages. Love before marriage is considered taboo and lovers are seen as sinners. Young men and women cannot celebrate their love outside the institution of marriage, most often arranged for reasons other than love.

When in Pakistan, I knew many young men and women who were virgins when they got married and had only one sexual partner all their lives. Since they were not allowed to date, their friends and families chose their spouses for them. Even my own parents had never met or even seen each other before the marriage ceremony. How two strangers can get married and live with each other for decades is still a mystery to me. Many of them insist that they started loving each other after they got to know each other. Arranged marriages seemed unnatural to me even then.

After coming to North America, I discovered that dating was socially acceptable. When I discussed that subject with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, I found that couples, families and communities from different religious orientations had different expectations from that tradition. Those orientations can be seen on a wide spectrum. On one

end are conservative and religious leaders who see dating as an institution for finding a life partner, and do not condone pre-marital sexual relationships, believing them to be sinful.

Those at the other end are liberal who believe that dating is the choice of two adults and the church and the state should not interfere with people's personal choices. Such parents welcome partners of their grown sons and daughters and let them stay together if they wish. Their parents have open and honest discussions with their children about sex, love and marriage. They believe in sex and love education. They are comfortable talking with their sons and daughters about contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and the differences between healthy and unhealthy intimate relationships. In some families it can be a respected aunt or uncle who provides this type of dialogue.

When we try to understand the traditions of sexual morality in different communities and cultures, we discover two fundamental schools of thought. One group looks for divine guidance and asks their priests and ministers to guide them in their sexual morality. The other believes that adults can decide for themselves about their intimate lives without the dictates of the church. They stay in touch with recent developments in medicine, science and human psychology and take responsibility for their choices and consequences.

Dating encounters start during adolescence, a stage in life where human beings are going through a turbulent maturational process. They are trying to discover themselves and their roles in society. While they are planning their education, profession, and a place to live and work,

they are also deciding with whom they would like to socialize and date. Psychologically speaking, I feel dating makes people address the issues of lust, love and commitment and discover their sexual identity and orientation without feeling guilty. They struggle all their lives to find a healthy balance between their desire for freedom and their need of intimacy.

Children who have positive and healthy role models find it easier to choose their friends and lovers and get involved in successful, long-term, healthy intimate relationships, while those who have poor role models have great difficulties either in initiating or maintaining a healthy intimacy. I have always been in favor of the tradition of dating, as it allows young men and women to experiment and find out not only what they like and enjoy but also what they don't like and prefer to omit from their intimate relationships.

In religious cultures and societies virginity has been a major controversial issue. In some religious cultures men would marry only virgins. It is also interesting that many such cultures have double standards. It is acceptable for men to sleep with women but not for women to be intimate before marriage. The same men who would sleep with women they date would marry only a virgin. Men who are promiscuous are called "playboys" while women are called "sluts". Such double standards and hypocrisies have poisoned many families. In many cultures women have suffered shame, banishment, even death because of the emphasis on female virginity, even when rape has occurred.

Dating should be encouraged amongst young men and women so they can learn to take responsibility for their choices and the consequences that follow. Human sexuality



is a private matter between two adults as families and communities should encourage loving relationships. Cultures that forbid dating indirectly encourage secret affairs and hypocrisies. Love between two single people needs to be celebrated not despised, seen as a blessing not a sin.

Living in North America for more than twenty-five years, dating many women from different religious and cultural backgrounds as well as working professionally with couples from diverse religious traditions, I have found that dating is a fascinating human experience as it consists of a series of mysterious, often mystical, encounters. When young men and women get involved in intimate relationships, they encounter each other at many levels. Their romantic attraction leads to sexual encounters while their emotional closeness helps them become good friends and share their dreams and aspirations with each other. I always believed that friendship was the foundation of a healthy and happy intimate relationship. That is why lucky are the lovers and spouses who are also good friends.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## DATING IN SECRECY

*Dear Sohail,*

*My initial reaction to your stories about dating in most Eastern cultures was one of shock and disbelief. The practices are so restrictive and even cruel that it seems difficult to justify treating people in these ways. I felt thankful that this type of gender segregation had not affected my life. However, as I reflected on your letter it brought me back to my years in an all-girl school from kindergarten to Grade 11 and I realized that even this limited exposure to the experience of segregation presented very real challenges and left an indelible impression on my life.*

*One of the biggest challenges that occurs when we are segregated from something or someone is dealing with a type of emotional tension that develops. Those from whom we are isolated acquire an aura of mystery. Often times there are desires that are out of proportion to the feelings that are directly related to that person. The urge to be with them may not be related to an interest in being with that person specifically but the desire to satisfy other urges such as the need for self determination, or to satisfy one's curiosity, or as a rebellion against unrealistic limits.*

*Another more serious consequence of segregating men and women is one of misinformation. It has been my experience that when you keep information from a group, the group members fill that vacuum with their own imagination. When we are not familiar with another person or group we fill in the blanks from our own experience and in these circumstances the picture we create can be inaccurate. More often than not our perception is related to the reality of us rather than the reality of them. This lack of exposure insures that people start*

*their intimate relationships with minimum understanding and considerable misinformation. This is a recipe for failure, if not disaster.*

*Having observed the dynamics of dating, both personally and professionally over the last several decades, it is more than obvious in the Western world that the pendulum has swung from a restrictive view of sexual expression to the extremes of “free sex.” Consequently, we have seen not only more healthy expressions of sexuality but also a number of negative effects, only one of which is the emotional disconnection between the sexes. Game playing has become in some social circles a “sport” played with considerable shrewdness. Fueled by emotional distance, the games between men and women in the dating arena are considered to be justifiable since the parties involved are sometimes focused on accomplishing a range of very divergent goals – from a long-term relationship to an evening of sex. Many people in the game-playing mindset claim that it establishes a more equal footing between the sexes and is an effort to address the double standard.*

*We can all recall stories of game playing – some amusing, some disconcerting. At a party a number of years ago a man was asking people for personal information about a female acquaintance of the group. He was very attracted to her and had asked her out. She had refused because she said she was attracted only to “intuitive” men and she did not think that he was. He began gathering these facts – her birthday, her likes, dislikes etc., so that he could say that he had “sensed” these facts about her. He was successful in feigning sensitivity; within a year they were married!*

*What do you think of this, Dear Friend? Was it innocent fun or blatant dishonesty? I must assume it is as you have said when societies create circumstances that do not encourage*

*people to speak their truth, unusual ways of adapting occur.*

*A number of questions remain concerning dating. One of the most common, particularly among my female clients, is how do they figure out if a person they feel attracted to is trustworthy enough to build an honest relationship? If dating is the bridge between strangers and spouses, then how can people find others who are interested in building that bridge with as little distress and as much respect as possible?*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

## GOLD OR GOLD PLATED

Dear Bette,

When you asked me what advice I give to my female friends and clients who are dating and looking for a partner in life, I recalled my favorite expression, “Find out whether he is gold or gold plated. If he is gold keep him, and if he is gold plated leave him.” For me gold is a person who is honest and sincere, respectful and sensitive, while gold plated describes a person who is full of nice talk and charm – but shallow. He does all the right things like opening doors and bringing roses or sending romantic cards, but all those activities are to seduce the woman into his bed. After sleeping with the woman a few times, he disappears, as he believes “sex is like a bank account – when you withdraw you lose interest.” Such men say to their friends, “Love ‘em and leave ‘em.” Many such men that I have known over the years have great difficulties establishing committed and emotionally intimate relationships and being faithful. In the long run their lives are hollow – except for the chase.

My clients and female friends often ask me the million-dollar question, “How do I know if he is gold or gold plated?” The answer most often is, “Before you sleep with him, get to know him. Even if you find him sexually attractive, don’t become sexually intimate with him right away. Find out whether he has the capacity to be a good friend. Meet his other friends, neighbors, relatives and colleagues who have known him for years and listen carefully to what they say about him before getting seriously involved. If they like him, show respect and consider him a sincere and

honest person then you are reasonably safe. If he cannot be a sincere friend how can he be a sincere lover?

Getting involved in an intimate relationship can be an emotional risk and we need to take that risk seriously because many people get hurt if the relationship goes sour.”

When two people are friends as well as lovers, then even if the relationship breaks down there is some hope that both parties will end the relationship respectfully and gracefully and will not become vindictive and revengeful.

There was a time people were introduced to each other by their common friends but in the last few decades people have become so isolated that they have to rely on newspapers, magazines and internet dating services to meet. Some dating services are personalized and work hard to match people while others are ‘meat markets’ and have become a sophisticated form of escort services as they promote prostitution. Singles who want to establish a respectable long-term committed and loving relationship have to take responsibility to do their homework before they enter into a sexual relationship.

When I was invited by a local television station on Valentine’s Day to discuss romantic problems a woman called in, stating she was at home feeling lonely as she had no one to send Valentine’s cards and share her hugs and kisses. She shared that she had gone to night clubs for years but had never met the right man. When she asked my suggestions, I told her that in my experience night clubs were not the best places to find life partners. Singles are there to drink, dance and have fun or pick up a woman when both are half drunk for a one night stand. The loud music it is almost impossible to have any dialogue let alone a meaningful one.

I suggested she explore group activities that she likes. Those who have a hobby and a passion are more likely to meet people who share the same interests. Such shared activities are the first step in developing a social circle of acquaintances and friends which makes the process of dating more natural and comfortable. It is not uncommon in such groups for singles to be introduced to other single friends, this often becomes an encouragement to proceed further.

I also stressed that it is important to have a positive self-image to be successful in developing healthy intimate relationships. Those who do not like themselves have a hard time enjoying romantic relationships. I ask, "If you do not like yourself, how can you expect others to like you?" That's when I see "the penny drop."

Having a positive self-image, shared interests and a sincere friendship are good foundations for a healthy romance. For both parties, having a circle of close friends is also important as a safety net to cope with the crises of the relationship.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## DATING ON THE INTERNET

*Dear Sohail,*

*Gold or gold-plated – a simple but memorable way of underscoring that individuals may look the same on the outside but be remarkably different on the inside. One of the main challenges in the early stages of a relationship is discerning this difference. People can initially look and behave very much like your ideal partner but over time the veneer wears thin and the inner core of the person shows through. Sometimes it is consistent with the outside, sometimes it is not.*

*You mentioned the crucial components that will enhance the likelihood that dating will progress to a deeper bond whether that is an intimate relationship or a friendship or both. It has been my observation that building a friendship, finding common interests, taking the time to really get to know the person and strengthening personal awareness and self-esteem are central to a nurturing and enduring connection between two people.*

*Thus far we have discussed changes in dating from the perspective of sexual expression and emotional connectedness but one of the themes throughout our discussions, which I'll elaborate on, is the mechanism through which people meet their partners. We have moved from dating that is acceptable when arranged only by family to businesses designed to introduce potential mates. You mentioned the introduction of dating services, in newspapers or magazines and the most recent boon to expanding the number of potential mates – the internet dating service.*

*As dating expands electronically, the world becomes the community from which one can choose a partner. This is a big*



*advantage in dating and yet, the issues of building a relationship, specifically “really” getting to know the person that you are dating are extremely compromised in this kind of setting. It is easier to slant the truth or even outright lie when people are hundreds or even thousands of miles apart. Living in another city or another country diminishes the possibility that your social circles will intersect. Your practical suggestions of meeting a prospective partner’s friends and family who know them best are difficult to carry out. Often times people are involved deeply before they realize and accept that the person is not what they appear to be.*

*A friend of mine was embroiled for almost a year with a man who she’d met on the internet. It took her a long time to recuperate from the betrayal she felt as a result of the dishonesty in the relationship. She recalls, “He seemed so warm and sincere. He was a senior manager in the same industry that I was. We began slowly and mostly talked about work. It eventually became more personal; gradually we shared our intimate feelings, our hopes and dreams. I felt that we could talk forever. It seemed we could tell each other anything.*

*After about five months of daily contact, he said he had the opportunity to come to my city for a conference. He suggested that he stay in the hotel where the conference was being held. He never pressured me at all. In person we really hit it off. It was just magic!*

*Several months later he asked me to join him in England for a vacation. It was wonderful. We talked of our future together. About eight months after we meet I suggested that I would like to come to visit him. He initially tried to gently discourage it – he was working on a big project and he wouldn’t want to neglect me, airfares were very expensive this time of year, etc. When I pushed the issue, he began acting differ-*

*ently, he called less and less. It turns out he was married only a year before we meet and to his friends was totally in love with his wife. The thing that made me angry was that several times, particularly at the beginning, we would have these lengthy discussions about how important trust was! He was so convincing yet he'd been lying all along. I was devastated."*

*We hear similar stories of betrayal and dishonesty almost daily, so although we can benefit from the advantages that the internet gives us in dating it is important to temper that with the associated risks.*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

## CHAPTER THREE

# MARRIAGE

Dear Bette,

Growing up in the East for the first half of my life and living in the West for the second half, I had an opportunity to observe and experience two different cultural traditions quite closely. In the East most people are in arranged marriages and the majority were virgins when they got married. Families and friends chose the spouses and spouses lived with each other for the rest of their lives. In such marriages, families and communities played a larger role than the spouses themselves. The relationship was controlled mostly by the religious and social traditions of the tribe. In the West, on the other hand, young men and women fall in love, date and may decide to marry. In such marriages spouses play the primary role while families and communities are secondary.

When I talk to my Eastern friends, most of them feel very strongly that their tradition is better than that of the West. When I ask them why, they usually say, “Look at the

rising rate of divorce in the West. Love marriages do not last. On the other hand with arranged marriages, divorce is unknown.” Listening to such an argument, I smile. I feel that these friends are confusing the stability of the marriage with health and happiness. They assume that just because two people are living under the same roof, they are happy. I try to share with them that marriages in the East last, not because spouses are happy, but because they are forced to live together for two main reasons: economic dependence, and religious traditions.

Most women in the East remain uneducated, as many religious and traditional families forbid their daughters to enter schools and colleges. Nor do women have the family's blessing to work and live independently. I rarely met any women in the East who lived on their own; most remained economically dependent on fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. That is why they endure many injustices from their husbands and male members of their families. Men still demand their wives to obey them and if they don't, they become violent and abusive and then rationalize their behaviour as the wife's fault.

Eastern cultures are still overtly patriarchal. It is interesting that in such cultures, male dominated traditions are also reflected in their religious orientations. In most religions in the East men are still considered the masters and women the second-class citizens with limited choices. They put up with the unfairness, sacrifice their lives for their children and never think of leaving their husbands as they cannot live independently. They do not want to return to their families of origin, feeling they would be a burden on their fathers and brothers. Most assume that from their husband's house they go directly to the grave. In such circumstances, considering

that such intimate relationships are healthy and happy is not a true reflection of the marital relationships.

In the West, if spouses stop loving each other or find each other incompatible, they end the relationship. Some marry two or three times before they find the person with whom they feel really happy. Since Western culture is becoming more secular, the hold of religious institutions has diminished. The increasing acceptance of Gay relationships and marriages is remarkable evidence of the power of independent secular societies. We see more inter-faith marriages in the West. Fewer couples feel the need of the blessing of the church, so either they have civil marriages or they live common-law.

Another major difference is that in the West, where more and more women are working and living independently, their economic freedom also makes them more self-confident. Because of their high self-esteem and self-respect, they are less likely than Eastern women to put up with men's unfairness and abuse. In the West the relationships between men and women are decidedly more democratic than the East.

When we compare Eastern and the Western marriages, it becomes obvious that Western women have more choices than Eastern women. Even in the West, some women do not have the same rights and privileges as men, but the conditions are farther along the road to equality.

Parts of society feel strongly that spouses should live together for the sake of the children, while there are others who feel just as strongly that children are better off receiving the love of both parents separately than living in a hostile environment.

Love and sex are private issues between two lovers and

spouses, while marriage is a legal and religious institution. I sometimes wonder whether love is compatible with an institutional lifestyle. I have met many couples in my personal and professional life who loved and adored each other before marriage, but became enemies once they started living together. They lived in loveless marriages for years, and in order to cope, some became depressed, started drinking heavily while others had extra-marital affairs. It is sad to see lovers transforming themselves into strangers within a few years. Many people do not realize that loving someone is very different than living with that person. A cynical philosopher stated, "Marriages might last longer if spouses didn't live together."

Even in secular Western society many couples who follow Catholic or other religious philosophies have a difficult time ending a painful marriage. They feel guilty and ashamed and are worried about being ex-communicated. Religion plays a far bigger role in our lives than most people realize.

I met a Roman Catholic priest who believes in divorce. When I asked him the reason, he said that when the Catholic Church says, "til death do us part," it does not mean physical death, but death of love. How sad it is to see couples living together after their love has died.

On the other hand, it is so exciting to see couples who have been living happily together for decades. They not only fell in love but also grew in love. When I asked a couple who was celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary the secret of their happy marriage they replied, "We are not only spouses, we are also best friends and soulmates."

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## MARRIAGE – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

*Dear Sohail,*

*Your comparison of Eastern and Western attitudes related to marriage presented a number of interesting issues. Before I address them I would just like to clarify that although marriage is the central concept, I am assuming that we are talking about the range of committed relationships, those that are bonds of their love as well as bonds of the law.*

*The first thing your comments triggered was an interest in understanding the central need that is satisfied by marriage. I wondered why marriage is considered by many to be so important and whether there has ever existed a culture that did not have a bond such as marriage. That would be interesting to research, wouldn't it?*

*Clearly marriage or similarly committed relationships were initially designed to create and nurture children, keeping the vulnerable protected in very harsh environments. And yet, the drive towards marriage is still alive and well into present day.*

*When I talk to clients and friends about marriage, the reasons they give for wanting to get married range from love to convenience and various points in between. One of the most powerful reasons they cite is the need to love and be loved. Equally as powerful, but less present in our awareness, is the image afforded by marriage of being "normal". I have observed that many people get married, not because they have found the absolutely correct person for a long-term relationship but they have found a person that is "good enough" because "everyone else is doing it." This pressure to conform is not only manufactured inside us but very strongly reinforced by society.*

*I've noticed how uncomfortable people become when*

someone does not conform to society's expectations in this regard. Recently, a client in his early 30s came to me for counselling. He had frequently received hints from friends and family to "find a nice girl and settle down" and was feeling increasingly pressured to do this. He explained he was not concerned about his single status and was satisfied with his life as it was. He dated occasionally but getting married was not a priority in his life. He believed that he would eventually find the person he wanted to marry and he was willing to wait.

It was my opinion that he had a very healthy attitude toward marriage, while his friends and family, on the other hand, felt he was unhealthy enough to require counselling.

I question whether it is realistic to expect that two people who are different in so many ways can have happy, healthy marriages? Having a successful loving relationship like marriage is amazingly complex, the complexity of which we can appreciate when we think about bringing together two people with very different goals, philosophies and family values. It is akin to buying two different puzzles that depict different pictures and shapes and attempting to piece them together into an acceptable picture.

I remember one of my psychology professors at university teaching a course on Human Sexuality, saying that male and female sexual responses are so different that it is a miracle that we are able to achieve satisfactory sex lives at all. Scary, considering sexuality is only one aspect of a happy marriage.

Concern has been expressed that marriage for life may be unrealistic in view of the significant changes in our world. For example, advances in treating illnesses and promoting longevity have been so dramatic in recent years that our life span has been extended considerably. This is wonderful but how will it affect our long-term relationships? Prior to the 20th



century, individuals were expected to live only until they were 40 or 50 years of age, which would mean that couples would make the commitment when they married to be with their partner for 20 to 30 years. Today, life expectancy is well into our 80s or 90s meaning that couples could be married for 60, 70 years or longer!

Most social scientists and mental health professionals agree that it is of great concern that divorce rates are increasing; in fact, 34 percent of marriages in Canada and 50 percent in the US end in divorce. You commented that women are more independent and self-sufficient and therefore less willing to live in an abusive relationship or one that does not meet their needs. I agree. Interestingly, I recently observed a commentator on TV ask the question, “What do women rarely do when they are financially secure?” The answer was almost unbelievable – “Get married!”

You commented that at one time marriages lasted “til death do us part.” That was when our life spans were shorter and societal pressure forced us to remain in unhappy and unhealthy relationships. Now that we are living longer and are less willing to sacrifice in the ways previous generations did, what will the marriages of the future be like? But most importantly, how will those changes affect our children and our society?

*I'm looking forward to your reply, Dear Friend.*

Warmly,  
Bette

## THE PRESSURE TO MARRY

Dear Bette,

I agree with you that most people feel comfortable when they are in an intimate relationship as their need for intimacy is stronger than their need for freedom. Many unattached people feel like the fifth wheel at social functions.

Even single people like your client who are emotionally comfortable when alone may feel that they should engage in dating as some people keep subtly pressuring them to get married. They believe that settling down in life includes marriage. One of my chronically bachelor friends shared with me a story that you might find amusing. A young man was lying on a beach one morning when an elderly gentleman passed by and they had the following conversation.

Old man: "How are you doing, my son?"

Young man: "Very well, I am relaxing."

Old man: "Do you have a job?"

Young man: "No, I do not."

Old man: "Son, why don't you go and find a good job."

Young man: "Then what?"

Old man: "Then you will have money to buy a house."

Young man: "Then what?"

Old man: "Then you would be able to get married and have children."

Young man: "Then what?"

Old man: "Then you would be able to send them to school, raise them and then help them get married."

Young man: "Then what?"

Old man: "Then you can retire like me and relax."

Young man: "But I am relaxing now. Why do I have to go through all that and then relax?"

And they both laughed.

It is an amusing story as it highlights how people feel uncomfortable socially when meeting those who are single and care-free. They are perceived as careless and irresponsible rather than adventurous and free-spirited.

You are right that couples get married for one reason or another and stay married even when their marriages turn sour. You wonder why so many people do not end unhealthy and unhappy marriages. Many believe that being in a bad relationship is better than being in no relationship at all. They imagine themselves in the "single again" state living alone, sad and socially isolated.

I wonder why you feel that so many women stay in unhappy, unhealthy or even abusive relationships. Do you think their reasons are more economic or emotional or religious?

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## THE PRESSURE TO STAY MARRIED

*Dear Sohail,*

*Women stay in unhappy and abusive relationships for the range of reasons you mentioned – economic, emotional and religious. As we have discussed, religion, in the Western world particularly in the past, strongly influenced women's decision to stay in unhappy – even abusive marriages. It was completely unacceptable to end a marriage for any reason. The phrase from the marriage ceremony, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" was strictly honored. While in some religious communities this rule continues to be followed, individuals unable or unwilling to endure unhappiness have decided to disregard this aspect of their religious teachings even if they continue to practise other aspects of their religion.*

*The stark difference in the economic power of men and women is a reality, therefore women do remain in unhappy marriages because of the way in which they will be disadvantaged without the financial support of their spouse. The care and support of children adds to the pressure to stay. We know that the majority of single mothers live in poverty. In fact, recent data show that an astounding 83% of single mothers of children under the age seven live in poverty. (Ref. 1)*

*This is a difficult but not impossible obstacle to overcome. As society addresses this issue women are encouraged to pursue their education and employment, day care is more accessible and systems are put in place that require fathers to be more responsible in supporting their children financially.*

*If the financial reasons seem challenging to overcome, then the emotional reasons are even more complex and compelling. Women tell me that when a relationship is not abusive but simply lacks passion or nurturing, then it is easier*

*to justify staying for emotional reasons, such as feeling safe. A client, says, "He's a nice person even when he's drinking. He'll do anything for me but we live our own lives. We hardly see each other. We live like two strangers. It's been years since we made love – there really is no physical contact at all. But I love my house, my garden. I feel safe there. I can't imagine living by myself. I could do it but I just don't want to."*

*Additionally, some women stay because they feel so inadequate that they don't believe they can navigate through life as a single person. They say things like, "I don't want to live without love," or "I am nothing without a man." It is similar to your statement – "bad love is better than no love at all."*

*In an abusive relationship, the dynamics are more complex and extreme. Many experts have studied the puzzling question of why women stay. Certainly the financial factors are a significant consideration; however the emotional component is central in the understanding of this issue. Years of abuse, whether physical, sexual or psychological, create a mind set in the abused woman that she is powerless and helpless to do anything but accept the situation she is in. As part of the abuse she may have been told she would not make it on her own and gradually this belief became entrenched.*

*This is a prison, a terrible entrapment that is created in the mind of both jailed and jailor. These walls of fear and self-doubt can be toppled only by significant changes in the woman's inner dialogue and her external support systems. Without a doubt, society's growing rejection of family violence is another influencing factor that can steer the abused and the abuser in the direction of healthy resolution.*

Warmly,  
Bette



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **DIVORCE**

Dear Bette,

In some cultures of the East and the West, marriage is considered so sacred that it can never be dissolved and couples divorced. Such cultures force couples to live together even when they resent and hate each other. I know many Catholics socially and professionally who were excommunicated by the Church after they left their abusive spouses. The only way they could dissolve their marriages was through annulment. To receive the blessing of the Church they applied to the authorities, but the bureaucracy took years to complete the process. During that time, some started dating and living with their lovers. It was ironic that they could not marry their lovers because they did not have the blessing from the church. To me the tradition of annulment seems quite unnatural. How do the children of annulled marriages feel?

In cultures where divorce is socially and religiously unacceptable, many couples live like strangers in their own

home. Many don't talk to each other. Ironically such apathy is perceived by others as peaceful and their suppressed hate as love. Such an environment promotes hypocrisy. When families and communities play a major role in marital choices, separations and divorces can be very painful. In such social a environment couples feel ashamed and guilty and children of such couples experience public humiliation.

On the other hand in secular cultures, where spouses decide the future of their relationship, it is easier to obtain a divorce. When spouses realize that they no longer love each other or they are no longer compatible, they go their own ways. They don't feel obligated to sacrifice their personal happiness on the altar of marriage.

In the past, blaming each other was an integral part of divorce. People could not conceive of marriage ending without someone being responsible. They could not imagine arriving at the stage where they no longer loved each other and preferred not to live in the same home. In secular and humanistic cultures of the West, there is gradual awareness that people change and over a period of time spouses can grow apart. They may wish to adopt a different lifestyle than that which they chose decades ago. Spouses who were compatible with each other in their twenties might not be compatible in their forties or fifties.

In many cultures of the West, it is socially acceptable for couples to separate and after a year of separation, if they do not want to resume their relationship, they can apply for and receive a No Fault Divorce. I believe such a practice is natural and healthy and allows people to decide about their lives without worrying about legal and religious complications. In such cases divorce is seen as a new beginning rather than an end. It is not associated with shame and guilt.



During clinical practice, I see many couples who struggle to retain the health and happiness of their marriages. With them I explore the sparks under the ashes of their love. If the spouses are motivated to resolve their conflicts and improve the quality of their relationship, I recommend they undertake a few months of marital therapy. I work extra hard to save their marriage when children are involved. After a few months of therapy when they realize that irreversible damage has been done to their union, I help them to separate peacefully. With therapy, many such couples remain friends after their divorce; some became better friends than when they were living together. We helped them to decide about the future of their children in a respectful and graceful way. It is interesting to see three peaks in the divorce rates in the West:

- after one year of marriage, when living together was a disaster,
- after seven years, when their child started going to school,
- after twenty years, when the children became teenagers and no longer required close supervision by the parents.

Going through divorce requires facing social and economic losses alongside emotional stress. Divorce becomes very painful if one or both spouses are angry and resentful and feeling betrayed. It is more painful if small children are involved. Lucky are those who receive a lot of support from their friends and families. Divorced spouses need extensive healing time to recover from such a series of losses. In many cases divorce involves a shattered dream and it takes a long time to put the pieces together and move

on. Many go through a depressed and angry phase before they recover, become healed and are able to love again. Some never recover and never remarry. Some are open to intimate relationships but avoid any legal commitments.

I've met a number of people socially and professionally who feel that the institution of traditional marriage is becoming out-dated. They feel that in light of recent socio-cultural changes worldwide, we need new models of loving relationships. There are those who want to completely divorce the tradition of marriage, while others want to transform it in to a time-limited but renewable contract. Others favor common-law relationships. They recognize, as you did, the impact of modern medicine on longevity and the effect that a longer life expectancy can have on intimate relationships.

The essence of love, which involves freedom and spontaneity, is trying to break out of religious and social institutions. Because of modern advancements of contraception and women's economic independence, we have more control over human reproduction, so that the size of the family in the West is shrinking. Families with ten children are becoming exceptions rather than the rule. The populace is more interested in their emotional and spiritual growth than in maintaining dysfunctional families. We are on the verge of a new breakthrough in our personal, romantic and social freedom where secular and humanistic values will gradually replace religious and moralistic traditions.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## **DIVORCE THE PAINS AND THE LESSONS LEARNED**

*Dear Sohail,*

*Indeed, we are at the edge of a new view of marriage, divorce and the family unit. In the past, religion has dictated whether an individual is able to consider divorce, how they will undertake it and how emotionally burdened they will feel afterwards. In Western Society the church has a decreasing influence on society's view of marriage and divorce. Some members of society feel that the church has lost such significant ground that the impact of its influence is scarcely felt. And yet, I see the influence has just become more subtle. Instead of feeling completely prohibited from considering divorce in an unhealthy relationship, they divorce but may be forever impacted in their self-esteem and relationships, in particular with their children, by the belief that they have failed and that are therefore in some way inadequate. It would seem that through most transitional periods, including this one, the casualties are hard to identify.*

*Mental health professionals are the most obvious group to be at the forefront of analyzing the lessons learned to date about family relationships. Our professional group will need to play a leading role in guiding society towards contemporary but healthy changes to the family structure. I would like to touch on some of the issues that I think that will need to be addressed. Some type of loving family unit is vital for the nurturing and growth of us as individuals but particularly for our children. We desperately need to find ways to redefine and strengthen the family. However, the concept of marriage as being irrevocable does not acknowledge our human potential*

*for growth and the value in learning from our mistakes. As you have mentioned, this rigidity does not recognize that people who choose to marry as young adults may not foresee that they will grow in different, incompatible directions as they age. It is not a matter of lacking foresight but simply that individuals have made a mistake, an error in judgment. When we dictate that marriage can never be dissolved we do not acknowledge that to err is human and that we learn valuable lessons in the resolution of those errors.*

*It is unfortunate that the philosophy of learning lessons from our mistakes is a respected concept in areas such as business, but why not in marriage? For example, a good friend is a wealthy businessman who operates several successful businesses. He begins his weekly staff meetings with the request, "Tell me about your best mistake this week!" This approach is considered to be innovative, one that acknowledges the propensity of humans to make mistakes and makes it less likely that mistakes will be repeated. It enhances the potential of future success as mistakes are examined and people learn from them.*

*Divorce is increasingly prevalent in our society. No doubt we need to strengthen the family but we also need to find ways to offset some of the emotional burden associated with the family division.*

*Divorce is reportedly one of the most excruciating experiences to endure. It is a loss similar to a death but often with the additional trauma of betrayal or rejection. Adjusting to divorce is accepting the fact that someone who once loved you and wanted to spend a lifetime with you no longer loves you and might choose not to be in the same room with you. The person who was perhaps your best friend, confidante and lover has turned into your adversary. These circumstances*

*around the end of a marriage or intimate relationship can leave individuals feeling betrayed and violated at the deepest level. Understandably, many I have talked to about this have difficulty putting the intensity and complexity of their feelings into words.*

*Counseling experience has shaped my thinking about a life event from the perspective of the amount of stress associated with it. According to Holmes and Raye, divorce ranks second on the list of Stressful Life Events, topped only by the death of a spouse! In the majority of divorces there are numerous factors that add to the subsequent distress that individuals struggle to deal with at the end of a familiar relationship. There is often the loss of relationships with the partner's family and friends who may unfortunately choose to take sides. At least one person needs to find new accommodations and the money that went to support one household now is often spread thinly over two. In addition, there are the crippling costs often associated with the divorce. Usually the most significant challenge is the emotional upheaval for the partners of the relationship and in particular their children. Supporting children after the divorce in most cases is not short-term but spans many years and can be very challenging.*

*In my clinical practice with individuals and couples, a number of insights have been illuminated about marriage and intimate relationships:*

- *Divorce and even marriage is more about us (our strengths, our needs and our weaknesses) than about our spouses. We choose our partners to address needs within us.*
- *Divorce does not guarantee that the next relationship/marriage you are in will be happy or healthy. People sometimes decide that they would rather*

*divorce their spouse than work on their marital problems but often they later find themselves in another relationship having to deal with the same problems.*

- *Marital counseling does not ensure a happy marriage. I explain to my clients that successful marital therapy can result in continuation of the marriage or divorce, but whatever the decision the relationship is usually more healthy and functional. I ask them not to act impulsively in ending a relationship so that they may avoid the experience of forever being plagued by the thought that, as one of my client said, "I didn't do all I could have and should have done." Even when counseling cannot keep the marriage together, honest, giving work on a troubled relationship allows the individuals to walk away with much less guilt and shame as well as the assurance that they had done everything possible to save the relationship. As you so correctly pointed out, this effort is crucial for couples with children but also important in their personal emotional growth. You know my strong belief is that one of the main ways we grow is through our relationships.*

*In a nutshell, we need to accept the realities of today's families, including the possibility of divorce and use the knowledge that we have acquired to guide the growth of the family in the future. We must find ways to lessen pain and dysfunction associated with family relationships and embrace the gifts these relationships have to offer. Do you have any suggestions as to how we could achieve this? I look forward to your reply.*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

## MOVING ON

Dear Bette,

No doubt divorce puts a dent in one's self esteem as people accept it as their personal failure. Those who have low self-esteem to start with usually become depressed after the crisis. Many feel socially embarrassed, as they are vulnerable to other people's comments and criticisms. The very word "divorced" is socially isolating, even without considering friends drifting away.

I remember one patient who came to therapy following his marriage break-up. After two years when he was ready to be discharged someone asked how he had changed. He said, "When I came to therapy I believed I had failed but now I believe my marriage failed – I did not." Recovering one's self-worth and self-confidence is one major step in healing. Such a recovery becomes much more difficult if the family and community is conservative, traditional and religious and does not approve of divorce even if the marriage is painful and spouses suffer because of incompatibility and abuse.

My observation is that even after recovering from a divorce, a lot of time is needed before they can trust enough to fall in love. It takes time for emotional scars to heal. Women are surprised to see that many men recover quicker than women and enter intimate relationships earlier than their female counterparts. Do men start grieving the relationship far before they actually separate, so by the time they stop living with their partner they have already finished most of their grieving? Yes, even after a spouse's death men remarry earlier than women. This can be seen in a positive light and give men credit for recovering quicker, while

others see it negatively and believe that most men after living with their spouses become so dependent on women emotionally and socially that they are unable to live on their own. There are men who start looking for a woman as early as possible. Many cynics believe such men are not looking for spouses; they are looking for mother figures to cook and clean for them and keep their beds warm.

Bette, why do you think some people take longer than others to fall in love after their divorce or death of their spouses? Is it more acceptable socially for men to date sooner after divorce, or a spouse's death, than women? Why do children feel that their fathers have been unfaithful to their mothers even when the mothers are dead and they try their best to have their fathers feel guilty? The second marriage may alienate fathers from their children. Yet, I have also met adult children who are happy that their father met someone loving and kind and got a second chance in life especially when the relationship with his first wife was unhappy.

How interesting it is to see how people adapt to their new relationships and how differently children react to their parent's second marriages. Many have divided loyalties that they find are difficult to resolve.

Affectionately,  
Sohail



## DIVORCE AND RECOVERY

*Dear Sohail,*

*Yes, many people do recover and move into a new relationship without much delay while others take years before they are willing if ever to commit to a new relationship. The length of time between relationships seems to be interwoven with an individual's pattern of healing and capacity for resilience. Patterns of healing and resilience can be either healthy or unhealthy.*

*Within the patterns that are healthy, the length of time it takes to grieve and recuperate can take a few months to several years. Conventionally, many mental health professionals consider a grieving period from one year to eighteen months to be typical. Those who become involved in a shorter time frame are often viewed with disapproval by society and uncertainty by professionals. And yet, I have seen them come out of a partnership and be able to begin another healthy, loving relationship within several months.*

*Most are capable of beginning another relationship if they have worked through a greater part of the emotional issues associated with the loss of the last relationship. It is not enough that the person simply “wants” to be in love again but they must be capable of not bringing unwanted baggage into the next relationship. Some of the indicators that people are ready for this next step include, they have:*

- grieved the loss of the previous relationship and person or both,*
- understood the lessons that can be learned about themselves as a result of the experience, and*
- discovered how they can apply these lessons in the next relationship or in life.*

*These tasks are difficult but possible to accomplish within a short period of time. In such situations, you may find that a major part of the grieving is over, during rather than after the previous relationship because they anticipated that the relationship was coming to an end.*

*In the group with unhealthy responses, they may get involved within several months after the end of the marriage, or not at all. Some men, and even women, are unable or unwilling to live without the support of a relationship and promptly seek out a mate to either fulfill their emotional needs, or as you pointed out, to cook their supper! In the other extreme, a person may have been so traumatized by circumstances within the relationship or how it ended that they feel too fragile or fearful to enter into another partnership. Betrayal that is associated with an affair outside of the relationship is one example of the kind of experience that can slow down the healing process for the jilted spouse. An additional circumstance, such as an affair with a close friend or family member, almost always ensures that the sense of betrayal will be intensified.*

*In a nutshell, I have seen people become involved quickly (within several months) or remain celibate for life. Both can be examples of healthy and unhealthy transitions at the end of a marriage or partnership. Time since the last relationship in and of itself is not a solid indicator of a healthy or unhealthy end to an intimate partnership. Time between liaisons is a red flag to me when there are merely a few days or weeks, or more notably, when one relationship overlaps another; in other words when one of the partners is having an extramarital affair.*

*Increasingly, marriages are ending in this manner, so much so that people are beginning to see it as normal. However, from a practical perspective it is fraught with chal-*

lenges and filled with considerable emotional fall-out. As one of my clients said, “It was very messy emotionally – it was messy for me and the person who I had the affair with, but more painful and messy for our spouses and our children. Years later we still haven’t repaired all the damage.”

Some amount of time between relationships is healthy and desirable, so that issues and feelings from one relationship are resolved and do not spill over into the next relationship, polluting it and decreasing the likelihood of success.

You also asked my views on whether I find it to be more socially acceptable for men to date, after a relationship ends, than for women. My sense is that the double standard we had mentioned previously regarding single women and men coming into to a relationship also influences how men and women are perceived as they get out of a relationship. Clearly, the permission to express sexuality is not the same for men and women. Additionally, women are judged even more critically if they are mothers, while the fact that a man is a father has limited impact, if any, on his dating and beginning a relationship. In my professional and social life, I have observed that fathers are not expected to live to the same moral and social standard as mothers.

Finally, you may have noticed that my response to your questions focused on the end of a relationship by divorce, but did not include the adjustment to the death of a spouse. The transition to another relationship when a spouse has died is viewed in a different light. The death of a spouse or partner is the most untainted “No Fault” scenario. Even in liberal societies there is an air of shame and inadequacy that follows the person who is divorced that is not part of the aftermath for a widow or widower. Although it may be very painful for the person who’s partner has died, the possibility that they may

*establish another intimate relationship albeit too quickly is more accepted by society possibly because it receives more approval by religious communities.*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

CHAPTER FIVE

## **FAMILY OF THE HEART**

Dear Bette,

Last night I went to dinner with my old colleague Anne, and new friends, Susan and Steve, a delightful couple. One of the topics discussed was about friendship. Anne was mystified how I could have nearly fifty close friends by saying that most people she knew had only three or four close friends, the rest were acquaintances. She said she had a hard time maintaining a friendship even with as few as five close friends. From one she had received a letter at Christmas but she had not opened it as she felt guilty for not corresponding on a regular basis. She was surprised that with so many close friends the number I had attained kept increasing over the years.

A year or two ago, I itemized a list of all my close friends and it came out to be thirty-nine, twenty women and nineteen men. When I reviewed the final list, I was surprised that most of my female friends were North American, while most male friends were Asian. It made me realize that it

was easy for me to have emotional closeness and openness with Western women and Eastern men. I always wondered how much it depended upon individual personalities and how much it was a reflection of cultures.

When I think of Eastern culture, I recall growing up in an environment that was quite segregated. Such a culture did not allow young people to date, so it was difficult for young men and women to socialize and get to know each other in a more personal way. On the other hand, the relationships between men and men and women and women were quite encouraged, so there were always same gender close friendships.

After coming to Canada I opted to socialize with women and developed good friendships with them. Interestingly, I had difficulty having close friendships with Canadian men. Most of them were interested in sports and they wanted to play golf or hockey with me rather than having long, intellectually stimulating and philosophically passionate discussions that I was used to in Pakistan. With some men I played racquetball and squash and enjoyed the game but unfortunately those men remained acquaintances. Those relationships did not (or could not) transform into friendships. There were a few exceptions when I met a man who had the capacity to be emotionally close to me without being homophobic.

In the East, men are used to hugging each other, holding hands while walking and even kissing each other on the cheek, without worrying about being thought of as homosexual. Such a tradition does not exist in the West. Whenever I tried to affectionately hug a Westerner he cringed or froze or looked at me with suspicion. I sometimes wonder whether my male Eastern friends reflect the

Eastern side of my personality while my female Western friends reflect the Western side of my character. Perhaps, over the years, I have become a multi-cultural person.

Susan asked, "What is your secret for having so many close friends?"

"I'm not sure," I answered. "I know I like human beings and I am fascinated with creative, non-traditional and unconventional people. So if I meet such people socially, I tell them that I would like to meet them again so that we can spend some time together. Your husband Steve is a good example. After I met him, I enjoyed his company. So I said I would like to dine with him one evening. He agreed, and we had a wonderful dinner together during which I introduced him to my favorite writer Anais Nin and told him that I was writing an article about her philosophy. Now that I have finished the article, I suggested that I come and visit one evening and show what I wrote about Nin. This is the beginning of a potential new friendship. If we meet a few times, I am confident we will become close friends. Steve seems to have the capacity for dynamic dialogue that I enjoy in a friendship. For a dynamic dialogue, we need open minds and flexible personalities. We can learn from each other and help each other grow. That is why I believe friendships are the best relationships because they bring out the best in all of us."

Steve was curious. "Why don't you have friendships with Eastern women?"

"It is not a simple question to answer," I said. "Whenever I tried to have a close friendship with an Eastern woman, within a short time there were complications. Most Eastern women still need the blessing of their fathers, husbands, brothers or sons before they feel comfortable

having friendships with men. Many Eastern women face great opposition if they want to socialize with men. Let me tell you the most recent example which happened to me last month.

An Eastern woman called me at home and left a message with her phone number. When I returned her call, she said, "Do you remember I met you a couple of years ago in a conference in Toronto, where I listened to your poetry? After the function, I told you that you looked like a philosopher." I replied that I vaguely remembered her. She had wanted my views on hypnosis and I gave her my opinion. She asked about my website and I replied with the necessary information. A few days later she called again and asked, "Why do you need to leave Islam to become a Humanist?" I asked her whether she had read my book, *From Islam to Secular Humanism*. When she said "No", I told her that if she was serious about understanding my philosophical journey, she could come to my clinic and I would offer her a copy. I had realized she was quite a bright woman who wanted to become a friend. She arrived and I offered a cup of tea and my book, and we talked for more than two hours. Before leaving she said that she was having marital problems and feeling trapped in her marriage. She was living with her husband because of two children who needed her. I would not discuss her marital problems, as it was our first meeting.

That night I received a surprise telephone call from her husband who asked, "Did my wife come to see you?"

Playing dumb I asked, "Which wife?"

The next day when I asked her about the incident, she said that her husband followed her wherever she went, as he was afraid she was going to leave him. I told her that we



could not be friends because she was not a free person. I never heard from her again. This might be an extreme example but there are a number of Eastern women who feel trapped in their homes and families and are unable to explore the creative and non-traditional sides of their personalities. Their relationship with men becomes a threat to their family's pride and in extreme cases the family resorts to the so-called honour killings. It is an unfortunate reality. The social freedom that many Western women have gained is a rarity in the East. It might take them another hundred years to enjoy friendship with the opposite gender and not worry about the social, political and religious backlash."

"What do you do if you feel betrayed by a friend?" Susan asked.

"A very good question," I replied. "Every friendship can experience a crisis. Some survive, while others don't. I try my best to save the friendship through an open and honest discussion. Generally, I succeed, but sometimes I don't. Let me tell you of a recent example of saving a friendship after a five-year break. A friend I had known for fifteen years invited my sweetheart and me to her wedding but we broke up before the event. When I met with the bride and told her about the break up, I gave her a choice: "If you would like to invite my former friend, feel free to do so, but I will not attend your wedding but if you would like to invite me, then I will bring another lady friend." I was assured it would not be a problem, she would not invite my former friend and I could attend with my new friend, Marie.

"While sitting in the church, we were shocked to see my former friend in another pew. Furthermore, after the ceremony she came to us to question why Marie was there and

where was her boyfriend Edward. Marie explained that she was with me as a friend, not a date, and her boyfriend was comfortable with us attending the ceremony together.

“I felt betrayed. I was embarrassed that my date had to face such an unnecessary interrogation. I was so upset with the bride I did not talk to her for five years. Last month when she called, I finally felt ready to meet her. When I explained why I was so upset with her, she apologized profusely. After that meeting I forgave her and now we are friends again. Friendships need earnest effort to resolve issues. Obviously some issues are easier than others to repair. There have been times when I unintentionally hurt my friends’ feelings, but when I realize that, I write a letter of apology.”

Dealing with conflicts sometimes provides an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and grow with those experiences. In some ways friendships are different than sexual relationships because in most cases friends can sort out conflicts easier than lovers. Sexual intimacy is a mixed blessing. In some cases sexual intimacy enhances, and in others it undermines the friendship. Lucky are the lovers who also remain best of friends.

Friendships between men and women are more complex than same gender friendships. I have seen many friendships between men and women that became complicated because of sex, marriage and having children. It is amazing how intimate relationships are affected by family, legal and religious traditions. How difficult it can become for couples to maintain a friendship if others judge them negatively and harshly. Friends have to be strong, healthy and mature to have such a strong bond and to define their relationship according to their own philosophy while at the

same time not be negatively affected by the attitudes of others.

For years I have been trying to enjoy friendships with both men and women in which the reactions of others did not matter. I feel fortunate to have established many such friendships. I call these friends my *Family of the Heart* and you are one of them. I believe our friends are our emotional Registered Retirement Savings Plan.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## FRIENDS OR ACQUAINTANCES

*Dear Sohail,*

*I quite like the phrase, “Family of the Heart.” It has that wonderful effect of elevating friendships to the special status usually reserved for relatives you love. For many people, relationships that are initiated and sustained voluntarily are often the lifeblood of our support systems. The deposits of time and energy we put into these emotional investments can reap significant benefits in the long term. You and I are so privileged to have been for so long a part of each other’s “Family of the Heart.”*

*Your conversation with your dear friends Anne, Susan and Steve was similar to ones I have had with friends and clients about these essential relationships. One of the main differences in your perspectives is how each defined “friend” and “acquaintance”. You and those who share your view see your relationships with others from the perspective of how emotionally, intellectually and creatively connected you are when you are with them. It does not matter so much how far apart you live or how often you are in contact. Others feel that unless a person is a regular part of their daily life, travels in the same social circle or lives in the same community, that they are not friends, nor do they have the potential to be friends, merely acquaintances. If friends are not close geographically then the tendency is to weaken that relationship with distance emotionally.*

*Intertwined with this issue is the aspect that Anne mentioned, the amount of maintenance that is required to preserve the relationship and the pressure that comes from that sense of duty. Some people are “High Maintenance Friends,” their expectations of a friend is that they must remain*

*in contact regularly, usually daily or weekly, whereas others are completely accepting that good friends see each other as the heart and opportunity determines. My sense is that when both people share the same expectations the relationship is more satisfying.*

*Let me give you an example from my life. Bobby has been my cherished friend since we were in our early 20s. There have been times when we have not been in touch with each other for years at a stretch, but I know that there is a genuine caring for each other and a deep trust. Though I may not see her for a period of time, I could call her today and I would be greeted with warmth and caring. There would be no apology needed because we haven't connected for some time. We would not have to warm up to each other or get reacquainted as we would just pick up where we left off. It is like a welcoming fire that is always there to warm you. The trust in our relationship has been like that since we first met. As Bobby has pointed out, our social circles, even our lives are very different, yet, we have this capacity for true emotional intimacy that comes from being in tune with our deepest, truest selves. In contrast, I have those who feel that I am not being a close friend if I don't call every week!*

*Your comments about your relationships with Western men brought me back to the earlier years of our friendship, at the time of your arrival in Canada. I watched you try to establish the type of relationships that you were used to having with male friends in our social and professional circle. On a number of occasions, I recall feeling that heartache that one feels when a friend's innocent actions are misunderstood and rejected. The kind of emotional and intellectual closeness you wanted with them was misinterpreted. Physical contact in the form of a hug only added further suspicion. Later when I saw the*

warmth you had with your Eastern male friends, I more fully understood what you had been trying to create. To this day, I find joy in the affection and depth of the bond that I see you share with your male friends from the East. To me, your capacity for connecting with these friends is a gift of the Eastern culture, where sadly, as you have pointed out, the relationships between men and women have not fared so well.

How distressing it is that Eastern culture defines the lives and relationships of women with such harsh limitations. It is shocking that the platonic relationships that you wished to have with Eastern women would require the permission of a male relative. While I understand your concern for the possible lethal consequences of these friendships, what intrigued me was that these attempted friendships did not take place in Pakistan but in Canada. Furthermore, the women you would have wanted to befriend, I would think, would be those who would share your interest in the arts, writing or intellectual discussions, women who would likely be well educated. Still they felt the oppression from a culture and country far way. Acts of abuse or oppression can be long lasting. I have often found that people who have been oppressed struggle to overcome oppression, long after the oppressor is gone. It has been an unfortunate and somewhat unexpected contrast to meet Eastern women who were well-educated leaders in their professions who still seek the permission of their husbands to assume responsibilities and positions that they were clearly capable of assuming without approval from others. The enjoyment of platonic friendships is only one of the freedoms that they are still unable to embrace.

Warmly,  
Bette

## BUSINESS AND LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Dear Bette,

One of the things that really amazes me is to see how people transform their loving relationships into business relationships which they then experience as disappointments and heart breaks. They fail to realize that business relationships have very different dynamics than loving relationships. In a business relationship the goal is fairness and justice but in a loving relationship the goal is to share one's affection, enjoy each other and grow together.

Let me provide an example to prove my point. I was working with a single mother, who was trying to have a better relationship with her children. In one session she told me that her eighteen-year old son was moving back and was going to live in her basement. I was quite excited for her. I was hoping it would help her reconnect with her son. When she told me that she was going to charge him \$200 rent per month, I asked, "Why are you doing that?"

"I want him to be responsible, she replied, "if I rented my basement apartment to a stranger, I would have charged \$400, but with my son I will only charge him half that."

As I quietly listened to her explanation she sensed my silence appeared to express my disapproval and she became defensive. "I am not going to use his money. I will put it in a bank account and give it back to him when he starts his university education."

"Do you realize by charging him rent, you would change a loving relationship into a business relationship?"

"I don't understand," she said looking confused.

“The mother/son relationship is special. It is loving and sacred. If you need financial help then your son should help you without you asking him. By charging him rent you will become a landlady and he will become a tenant and it might backfire on you.”

My patient did not understand my point of view and explained that she knew many parents who did the same thing. She also told me that being from the East maybe I was not fully aware of Western traditions. After listening to her comments, I smiled and remained quiet until the topic changed.

Her son moved in and she asked him to pay rent. For the first three months, he paid \$200 regularly and she was happy with the savings that she secretly set aside for him. She told me later that I was wrong in assuming that there would be problems. I smiled again and remained quiet.

When the fourth month arrived, she became distressed when he paid her only \$100. When she inquired, he told her that he had spent only two weeks with her. The other two weeks he was with his new girlfriend and had spent \$100 going out to movies and dinners with her. The fifth month she again received only \$100. When the mother confronted him that he had spent the whole month living at home, he said that most of the time he ate at his girlfriend's house, so she was saving money on food. Within a few weeks, the discussions between mother and son deteriorated into major arguments and finally her son moved in with his girlfriend and now mother and son don't communicate.

Last week, she told me that it had taken her a long time to realize the difference between business and loving relationships. It still amazes me how in materialistic and capitalistic societies many loving relationships are trans-



formed into business relationships. Even the concept of 50 / 50 in intimate relationships is strange for me. It is not easy for me to interpret 50 / 50 when people belong to different classes. If a person who earns \$100,000 a year is married to someone who earns \$50,000, in my eyes one person's fifty cents are equal to another person's dollar. When I talk in these terms, many are surprised. I tell them that I have heard that in one socialist country when people are caught speeding on the highway, they are not fined a fixed amount like in Canada, rather, they are fined one day's pay. So a worker might pay a \$10 fine where a businessman might pay \$500. In my mind that is real fairness and justice.

I am quite surprised that many families naively change their loving relationships into business relationships and later wonder why there are unpleasant surprises. I am pleased to say that once people accept the concepts of business and loving relationships and try to practise them, their lives and relationships become more enjoyable and exciting – and less complicated. It took me a long time to appreciate the differences in the dynamics of different relationships in my own life.

Do you agree with my observations and experiences?

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## ESTABLISHING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

*Dear Sohail,*

*Your concept of business and loving relationships is an original and progressive perspective on the dynamics and challenges of these relationships. I agree that the goals of the two relationships, loving and business are different. Initially, however, I was not sure if I agreed that it is not a good idea to bring the two together. But after I reviewed the loving and business relationships that I had known personally and professionally, I realized that your ideas are very valid. Then it occurred to me that fleshing this concept out would provide valuable guidance when individuals are considering the merger of a loving relationship with a business one, so I thought I would present my views.*

*When you consider the number of families and loved ones that not only live together but are also in business together, it becomes obvious that moving between loving relationships and business partnerships is commonplace in our society. Whether it is being part of the family company or lending the down payment on a home to a loved one, business transactions are a regular part of life. Oftentimes family and friends move from one to the other with little hesitation or even much deliberation.*

*Yet in the business world, it is well known and accepted that these two types of relationships may be incompatible in some ways. It is understood that initiating intimate relationships in the workplace is approached with considerable care and is generally not recommended. Initiatives to the corporate world are inundated with words of caution and stories of how this combination can go dreadfully wrong.*

*Disagreements that are part of every relationship are anticipated in a business partnership. In order to ensure fairness and protect the business, parameters around these liaisons are outlined in legal documents and recorded in minutes of meetings. Occasionally, people who are considered foolhardy will function with a verbal agreement on the details of their business transactions, but it is not the norm. Yet it has been my observation that, unless it is a substantial family enterprise, family and loved ones frequently do business without written or even verbal understandings in place.*

*There is limited awareness of the possible challenges encountered when blending business with family life. Even with a contract or agreement in place, the price to be paid should something go wrong is very high. If there is a major disagreement in a business relationship and the relationships are irreparably damaged then that is difficult, but at least you are not losing your relationship with your loved one as well as your business.*

*One of my clients, an executive in a large family company, has given considerable thought to the complex dynamics of blending loving and business relationships. She expressed her thoughts in this letter.*

Dear Bette,

Something I remember you saying to me years ago went something like this. A family business takes the relationships that exist among family members and puts them in a business environment. The strengths and weaknesses that exist in those relationships are only compounded by the challenges of business. From experience, your words were true.

Another thing that I have come to realize as a child in a family business is that you are always a child. A simple fact is that, no matter your age, you will always be younger than your parents and that makes you a child. Those years will make a difference, big or small.

To truly succeed in family business, all the ‘baggage’ must be checked at the door. When you walk into the office in the morning, the roles of mother, daughter and brother are exchanged for accountant, manager and sales person. Sadly, most come to work with our luggage and forget our roles.

Sincerely,  
Simone

\* \* \*

*Simone’s letter reflects the struggle with the boundaries between home and work, love and business that she and many others who work in family businesses experience.*

*Personally I had credited myself with being aware of the dangers that these kinds of liaisons posed and when my intimate relationships crossed over into the business world, I had made certain to take particular care to discuss the details of such an arrangement. I would describe my understanding of the business agreement with the family member or friend and made sure they had a solid understanding of the boundaries and guidelines as well. I would insist on doing this even if they thought it was unnecessary. I emphasized that what we were doing was risky and that our relationship was of primary importance. I falsely believed that this discussion of the risks somehow guaranteed that those close relationships would be*

*protected and in fact many of them were. However, several years ago a blended loving and business relationship in my life went very wrong and valuable relationships were irreversibly lost.*

*I still think that I had addressed many of the important precautions, such as detailing my awareness of the risks, outlining the expectations and boundaries, and discussing the possible ways this situation could go wrong as well as how they might be best handled. When it went off the rails, I wondered if there were other suggestions in addition to these that would reduce the risks in these relationships when we decide to undertake them. I also concluded that it would be crucial to identify red flags that indicate that a business relationship should not be undertaken with a loved one.*

*In the last several letters, our discussions on the dynamics of business and loving relationships and the novel concept of “the Family of the Heart” are a natural lead into a topic that I know you have focused on in your professional work, that of the family.*

*Though my clinical focus has been individual and group work, you have had a special interest in the family and family therapy. Therefore, I am especially intrigued to know your “kernels of wisdom” concerning this critical subject. You grew up in the East with the tradition of extended family, while in the West the nuclear and single-parent families are much more prevalent. It would be very worthwhile if you could share the synthesis of your observations about the family. As well what do you see as the roles of the extended family – aunts, uncles and grandparents in the upbringing of the next generation?*

*Warmly,  
Bette*



CHAPTER SIX

## **EXTENDED FAMILY**

Dear Bette,

One of the most fascinating things I learned about human sexuality was that there was a time in history when human beings did not know that childbirth was related to sexual intercourse. Young men and women freely loved and made love to each other. Some women gave birth to children, others did not. Pregnancy was believed to be an act of gods and goddesses rather than humans. It was thought angels put babies in mothers' wombs. They believed all pregnancies were immaculate conceptions.

Those were the times when people were very respectful to women and considered them as goddesses who gave birth to life. They considered them sacred and holy. The expressions of mother tongue and mother-land still remind us of those wonderful times. In a strange way ignorance was bliss. Those days children were the children of the tribe. All women were called moms and maternal uncles played a major role in helping mothers to nurture and disci-

pline the children. Children had strong bonds with their aunts and uncles.

Once human beings discovered that childbirth was related to the sexual act that had taken place nine months earlier, men started to become possessive of their wives and children. They started to control family traditions, and to make sure that their children belonged to them; they started giving them their names. It is interesting that even today in the Jewish tradition children whose mothers are Jewish are considered Jewish and in the Islamic tradition, Muslims believe that on the Day of Judgment, people will be called by their mother's rather than father's name. As cultures became patriarchal, goddesses became gods and God was called Holy Father rather than Holy Mother.

I was shocked to read that for centuries women were considered part of men's property like sheep, cows and land; thus it was prohibited for one man to sleep with other man's wife. Moreover, he could if he chose, offer his wife for a night to his guest as a gift without asking his wife's consent. Chiefs of tribes used to have as many wives as they wished but ordinary citizens were allowed only one.

As societies became more industrialized, monogamy and nuclear families became more prevalent. Karl Marx had great misgivings about the institution of marriage and monogamy, believing that a wife was perceived by a husband as a part of his personal property. He thought that if a segment of society practiced monogamy others had to rely on prostitution and adultery to satisfy their sexual needs. Before reading Marx I had never made that connection.

As nuclear families became more prevalent the role of biological fathers became more active. But fathers were



never as involved with their children as mothers. I met many fathers who told me that for the first few months they did not feel emotionally connected with their children. It was only when children started to respond emotionally that a bond was developed. Erich Fromm believed that motherhood was a biological construct but fatherhood was a social one.

When we read the biographies of creative men, whether scientists, artists, mystics or social reformers, we find that their commitment to their creativity, dreams and causes were more important than their families. Many sacrificed their family life on the altar of their creativity. Only a few creative men have been able to keep a balance between their family and creative lives.

In the East, because of the tradition of extended families – aunts, uncles and grandparents – play a significant role in the lives of children. In the West as nuclear families became more prevalent in the communities the role of aunts and uncles and grandparents became less significant.

In societies where governments follow socialistic principles, the responsibilities of fathers are gradually assumed by the state. If the state takes the responsibility of providing food, shelter, education and health care for all children in the community, then more and more women can choose to have children on their own and raise them as single parents. It is unfortunate to see that many single mothers are financially and emotionally supported neither by families nor the state and their children suffer. Whenever I meet children of single mothers I always wonder about their male role-models. In a strange way we are going back to that phase in history where aunts and uncles played a bigger role than biological fathers. But unfortunately in many

cases, because of the geographical distances, children are not able to spend much time with their aunts and uncles and grandparents. Many communities have recognized that need of children and established organizations like “Big Sisters” and “Big Brothers.”

I feel that the institution of the family is going through another transition and we have to accept new challenges if we would like our children to grow up to be happy and healthy citizens of their communities. We have to provide them with positive role models.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## MOTHERS, FATHERS, AUNTS, AND UNCLES

*Dear Sohail,*

*Children certainly do learn their approach to life from the role models around them whether they are parents or extended family members such as aunts and uncles. Role models are more powerful predictors of our children's future behaviours than our verbal guidance. Yet a surprising number of parents, at least occasionally, blindly embrace the notion that children must "do as we say, not as we do."*

*Your historical comments on sexuality were both enlightening and alarming. If we assume that our desire as we grow is to improve our lives and those of our children, it is obvious that although we have gained, we have lost some of the lessons along the way.*

*It was particularly sad for me as a woman that despite extensive knowledge of anatomy and physiology we have lost a large part of the special regard for women's ability to give birth. When you think about the development of a single cell to a functioning, complex billion-celled animal, it still is quite a miracle.*

*Additionally, the transition in the role of the father from respectful stewardship to controlled ownership seemed to have missed the desired goal of having fathers more emotionally and financially involved with their children rather than just bearing their name.*

*Having shared an historical perspective, could you talk about your experience with your extended family and how that influenced your role as an uncle?*

*Warmly,  
Bette*



CHAPTER SEVEN

## **LOVE AND SEX EDUCATION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION**

Dear Bette,

Growing up in an extended family in the East I was fortunate to have multiple role-models in the form of aunts and uncles who showered me with affection and looked after my emotional, social, intellectual and philosophical needs. I remember having passionate discussions with my uncles and aunts, discussions I could not have had with my parents.

When I arrived in Canada, I was surprised to see that children, who grew up in nuclear and single parent families were not very close to their aunts and uncles and grandparents.

Now that my nephew and nieces are teenagers they write to me and we have open and honest dialogues. I feel fortunate that they reach out to me. E-mails have been a blessing to bridge that geographical gap. In the last few months my nephew has been asking me a number of

questions about love, sex and marriage and I have been responding as openly and honestly as I can. I am sending you one of my letters that I wrote. I tried to summarize my concepts, experiences and readings. I am very aware that it is very hard to articulate one's philosophy in a few pages as people have written lengthy books on such subjects. In some strange way he was the one who inspired me to write this book that I welcomed you to join. I invited you into this affectionate dialogue to provide a medium for teenagers in the East to become familiar with the traditions of the West.

Would you mind discussing the following?

- your reaction to my letter to Zeeshan.
- the tradition of the “Dos and Don'ts” in your family, school and community where you grew up.
- were there double standards for boys and girls, men and women?
- what was it like for you to grow up as a female in North America?
- how have the values and traditions changed in the last few decades?
- what would be your advice to the young girls of the next generation who are confused about the relationships between sex, love and marriage?

I am very optimistic that our dialogue in the form of letters would create affectionate bridges between generations and cultures. Here is my letter to my nephew.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

Dear Zeeshan,

When I look back at my teenage years growing up in a conservative Muslim and traditional Pukhtoon culture, I realize that such an environment was not conducive to a healthy attitude towards human sexuality. Most of us grew up ignorant about the subject and were full of fear, shame and guilt. We could not talk about our sexual feelings with our parents or teachers, as the subject was taboo. There was no sex education at home or at school. Adults did not prepare their children to be aware of their choices and make responsible decisions about their sexual lives. Parents believed they knew best for their children.

Many aspects of human sexual relations were considered unnatural, immoral or illegal. It took me a long time studying medicine and psychology, and living in the Western world and enjoying loving relationships to feel comfortable discussing sexuality with my friends and patients. I consider it one of the most significant aspects of human relationships. You have asked me what are the ten things I wish I knew about sex as a teenager. I admire your courage to ask such questions. I hope that you and your friends do not live in the same darkness and with the same inhibitions as I did thirty years ago. I sometimes think that in those thirty years, so much and so little has changed.

When I thought about your question the following came to mind:

- It is quite normal for boys to have wet dreams as teenagers.
- It is quite natural for girls to have menses (start their period) when they reach puberty but it may vary by age.

- Semen is a secretion, like milk not an excretion, like urine.
- Masturbation is self-pleasuring not self-abuse.
- It is better for all to know about male and female sexual anatomy and physiology.
- It is better for all to be aware of the different stages of sexual development.
- Foreplay and after-play are as important as sexual play.
- Mutual orgasm is not the most important part of love-making.
- We should all be knowledgeable about different forms of contraception to experience different forms of sex (to choose between reproductive, relational and recreational sex).
- We should learn to accept rather than judge others who have different sexual tastes and lifestyles.

I have no idea in today's circumstances what Pakistani parents feel about their children's sexual lives. Who do they think will offer them sex education? There seems to be no preparation for accepting a child's puberty. Boys are not told that when their sexual hormones become active, alongside a change in their voice and facial hair, they will also have erotic and sexual dreams which will be associated with nocturnal emission (wet dreams). I think they need to be reassured as it can be quite a scary experience. They have to know it is quite natural and there is nothing to worry about.

Reaching puberty can be far more scary for girls than boys, as their menses can start during the day and can last a few days. I met many girls who were terrified when they had their first periods. Some of them had that experience



when they were in school. As they were not prepared they did not know what to do. They were terrified; some even felt they were dying. They could not even discuss it with their parents as there was no open communication. Many of them were as mystified when the bleeding stopped after a few days as they were when it started; they did not know that it would return every month. They were also not aware that periods could also be associated with abdominal pain and mood changes. Girls also have changes in their breasts which can also be embarrassing in front of relatives, friends and classmates. Most teenagers need a lot of emotional support and reassurance so they do not feel abnormal or unclean. In our culture it is usually the opposite. Not only are teenagers not reassured and supported rather they have to face social embarrassment and humiliation. Many make fun of them. Many of them might have acne and other facial changes that they cannot hide. Since many teenagers are sensitive about their looks and body image, such changes make puberty extremely challenging. Many girls like to wear make up, adult clothes and jewelry, to identify with their mothers. It is unfortunate that many parents do not see it as innocent experimentation, instead they condemn and criticize. It broke my heart to see many parents tell their teenage daughters, "When you wear make up, you look like a whore." It is so devastating for girls to hear this from their parents, while they are exploring their own sexuality. It is ironic that parents forget their teenage years so quickly.

It is also sad that in many Eastern cultures people do not discuss human anatomy and sexual physiology without making reference to religious morality. Everything is discussed as right and wrong, good and bad, and teenagers are overwhelmed with the feelings of sin and guilt. Many

religious institutions have great difficulty accepting that sex can be innocent and loving, even spiritual. It is presented as unclean. I was told that after I had wet dreams I could not pray because semen was unclean and I was supposed to take a bath to cleanse myself. Semen is considered an excretion in many Eastern cultures. It took me a long time to discover that it is a secretion not a excretion and that is why in the West it is called love-milk and many women swallow it as part of lovemaking. I met so many Muslims who enjoyed having oral sex but would not kiss their lovers afterwards. When I asked "Why not?" they said, "Because she had semen in her mouth" and when I gently confronted them with, "It was your semen after all," they kept quiet as they were lost for words.

Similarly many teenagers are ill-informed about masturbation. I have read horror stories in the local magazines in Pakistan in which masturbation was associated with all kinds of physical and mental illnesses including blindness and mental retardation. It is also ironic that there are thousands of quacks earning millions of rupees treating teenagers who are confused about their sexuality. I have not met many Eastern parents who give their blessing to their teenage children about masturbation. They cannot say it is a form of self-pleasuring rather than self-abuse. Masturbation becomes even more important form of sexual expression in a culture in which young men and women are not allowed to date.

Most teens in Pakistan are not familiar with basic human anatomy and physiology. Many girls are not aware of the relationship between their vaginas, uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries. They do not know when they ovulate and do not know what function menses serves. It is unfortunate

that there are no words in Punjabi and Urdu to have a serious discussion with teenagers about sex. Many words used for different anatomical parts are slang and sound vulgar and obscene. One cannot talk about penis, testicles, vagina, clitoris, uterus or orgasm in Urdu and Punjabi as one can talk in English. I think writers, linguists, psychologists and intellectuals have to meet with parents and teachers to coin words and expressions in Urdu that would make it easier for teachers and parents to provide sex education to their teenagers. In my book about Gay and Lesbian literature and *The Myth of the Chosen One* I had introduced a few expressions to bridge that gap (for example *jinsi mairage* for orgasm and *dehni mubashirat* for oral sex). I vividly remember when I was in grade twelve and we were studying physiology one of our professors once drew the whole reproductive system of a rabbit on the blackboard and uttered every word except penis and vagina. He was so inhibited he could not utter the words. I used to wonder why we had such poor role-models and how those adults could help sexually liberate us as they were so inhibited themselves.

It took me a long time to realize that the word sex has many meanings and can be used for different things. I became aware of it when I learned about different stages of sexual development and the differences between hermaphrodites, transvestites, transsexuals and homosexuals. Many Easterners I met did not know the differences between these terms and sometimes used them synonymously.

Many teenagers and even male adults do not realize that the act of making love is more than just having sex. I met many women in my clinical practice who complained that their lovers were not sensitive enough to their feelings

as they did not pay attention to fore-play and after-play. Once they had their orgasm they rolled over and fell asleep. They did not cuddle and hug and hold their partners before or after making love. They said in a sarcastic way, “For them it is screwing not making love. Slam bam, thank you Ma’am.” For many women it is as important to go out for a romantic dinner, dancing and have pillow talk about intimate things as it is to have intercourse. Many men are not tuned into such feelings of their partners.

There is also a lot of misunderstanding about the concept of mutual orgasm. Most couples do not realize that female and male sexual responses are significantly different. Many women take longer to have an orgasm. That is why fore-play is very crucial for them to fully enjoy making love. Making love is not supposed to consist of a hurried few moments for a man seeking relief from an erection. It is intriguing that most men who express an interest in sex therapy complain of premature ejaculation. They want to reach orgasm later while most women who come for sex therapy complain of taking too long to have an orgasm. Men want to delay their orgasm while women speed it up. It is the issue of timing. I encourage many men I see in my practice to stimulate their lovers and spouses through other than genital stimulation by kissing and touching different parts of the body so that the woman is ready to experience an orgasm prior to intercourse.

It is also important for some couples to accept that some women may not always have an orgasm while having intercourse if there is not enough clitoral stimulation. I think the more men and women are comfortable with their bodies and are able to stimulate themselves individually to the point of having orgasm, the easier it is for them to enjoy

making love. I encourage my patients to learn and enjoy masturbation if they want to enjoy intimate relationships with their lovers and spouses. It is ironic that many women in the East as well as in the West have never experienced orgasm. Many men and women do not know that women can have multiple orgasms in a short time and may not have to wait very long before having a second orgasm.

Because of the lack of sex education many young men and women are not aware of their reproductive system and cannot choose different forms of contraception, such as the rhythm method, condoms, intrauterine devices and the contraceptive pill. They do not know that pregnancy is directly related to ovulation. Since a human ovum is alive for only 24-36 hours, it is only a couple of days before and after ovulation that women are most likely to get pregnant. Many infertile couples have been trying to conceive but are unsuccessful because they are not aware of this basic fact of human physiology. On the other hand many unwanted pregnancies take place because of the same lack of awareness and planning.

It is ironic that in conservative Eastern cultures contraceptives are not freely accessible to young men and women. I was shocked to find out in medical school that most medical graduates believed that family planning was against Islam and that is why they did not recommend any form of contraception to their patients. I met dozens of young women while doing my internship in a women's hospital who wanted to stop having babies but their husbands did not support them. They did not allow them to take the contraceptive pill or use an intrauterine device while they

themselves did not use condoms as they believed they would not enjoy sex while wearing a condom.

It is unfortunate that in many traditional and religious cultures sex is only approved only for the purpose of reproduction. For couples to have sex to express their profound love for each other or just have fun is not accepted and blessed. So couples who have sex but do not want to get pregnant feel guilty.

Because of religious control couples are conditioned to have sex only in the bedroom and only in certain positions (many religious institutions bless only the missionary position, where the man is on top). For women, being on top or having sex in many other possible positions is discouraged. No wonder that after awhile sexual relationships start to lose their spontaneity and sense of adventure. In the East there is also an issue of privacy. Many couples have to make love in the dark, very quietly. They do not want to disturb others. No wonder in such circumstances many men have not seen the naked body of a woman even after being married for a number of years.

Religious institutions usually do not bless sexual experimentation and varied lifestyles. Many consider homosexuality and having more than one sexual partner as sin. They also have double standards. Many things are acceptable for men but not for women. In Muslim countries men can have more than one wife but women cannot have more than one husband.

When I was a teenager there was never any discussion about sexually transmitted diseases. Nobody discussed how men and women contact herpes, syphilis, gonorrhea or infectious mononucleosis. In recent years, there is lack of education about AIDS (auto-immune deficiency

syndrome). Most young people do not know that AIDS can be contracted through contact with other body fluids (especially blood) and may not necessarily be sexually contracted.

For young boys and girls, men and women to be able to make adult choices and take responsibility for their actions, they need to be informed about the relationship of sex with pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. People who have multiple partners have to know the risks they are taking. I was surprised to meet three monogamous women who had contracted syphilis who had never been sexually intimate with anyone other than their husbands; the husbands had been promiscuous. Thus, to be responsible, and one has to take responsibility not only for one's own sexual lifestyle but also for the lifestyle of one's partner. For such choices we need open and honest dialogue between lovers and spouses, and between children and parents and teachers.

The time has come for families and communities to create an environment for people to be sexually liberated and enjoy their romantic lives rather than being burdened with fear, shame and guilt. I think that rather than associating sex with sin, we should associate it with love and spirituality, which are foundations of healthy loving relationships, families and communities. Sexuality is part of our humanity and we have to accept its responsibility individually and collectively. Sex education is the first step in that direction.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## LESSONS IN LOVE AND SEXUALITY

*Dear Sohail,*

*Well done! You have been able to touch on many of the main areas of confusion related to sexuality and to provide Zeeshan with a stepping-stone from which to expand his knowledge base by asking further questions or reading. The information that you have imparted to your nephew is vital, not only for teenagers in Eastern cultures but those in the West, as they explore their sexuality on their own in early years and later in relationships with others. I wholeheartedly agree with your comments on the need for healthy role models for a better understanding of sexuality.*

*The taboos associated with talking about sexuality are obviously extreme in the East. It is shocking to learn that there are no respectful words to describe normal sexual acts or reproductive anatomy. That simple fact speaks volumes about how much sexuality is kept in the closet and the profound need for information such as you have willingly shared with your nephew.*

*Although in Western cultures we may not experience these extremes, we appear to be at a stage where most parents acknowledge the need to talk about sexuality and reproduction with their children just as they would any other normal function of the body. But awareness does not always translate into action and so many parents are reluctant to discuss sexuality with their children because of their own discomfort. So you could say that we are further down the road than Eastern cultures but still have a long way to go on the path ahead.*

*You have asked about traditions in my culture today and when I was young. I was a teenager on the cusp of the sexual*



revolution that swept through North America dramatically changing the ways in which sexuality was viewed, practised and talked about. Being on an island (Newfoundland) we were somewhat protected from the impact so that the attitudinal change was more of a noticeable ripple rather than a tidal wave, showing its effects when I was becoming a young adult. Consequently the ways of thinking about sexuality when I was a teen were very restrictive. Teenagers, particularly girls, were kept in line by threats of moral and emotional reprimand rather than physical punishment, as in Pakistan.

I graduated from high school in 1969. You could not mistake the obvious double standard for men and women, not only in the expression of sexuality but in what was expected of you as a woman. It was understood that “nice girls” didn’t have sex until they were married but “boys will be boys”. There were no specific discussions about sexuality but your behaviours and ideas were shaped by harsh admonishments.

I can remember going to visit my maternal grandmother one summer wearing a new sleeveless blouse and “pedal pushers”, or what we now call Capri pants. I was delighted with myself because new clothes were rare. When I arrived, my grandmother without speaking to me, picked up the phone and called my mother and said, “Joan, this child is out here with nothing on. The men across the street are looking at her shape.” I was promptly sent home. I was eight years old! To put things in the proper perspective, I both looked and felt like a little girl until I was about 13 or 14 years old. Today I find that event both humorous and sad.

As in many communities at the time, the idea of teaching basic anatomy and physiology in schools influenced by religious values was highly controversial, so more in-depth conversations about sexuality, such as sexual orientation or

*the emotional and physical details of intimacy were out of the question with parents or teachers. Individuals who took it upon themselves to guide us in anyway were so unusual that they became indelibly etched in memory.*

*There was my dear Aunt Helen, whose home I visited as often as I could as a teenager. We didn't have lengthy chats but I applauded her courage for just bringing up the subject of sex. One evening as my cousin Debbie and I were getting ready to go out with our friends in the neighbourhood, a group of both girls and boys, Aunt Helen came to the back porch to see us off. She suddenly leaned forward and almost whispered, "Don't let those boys get into your clothes!"*

*Well, I really didn't have a good idea what she was talking about. To be kind you could say that at 16, I was somewhat naïve. Despite my innocence, her comment was to the point and impossible to confuse. It guided me until years later I had developed my own standards.*

*There was also a literature teacher who, because she was new and young, stood out in our high school taught mostly by nuns. One day in class she did the unthinkable. Finishing her lecture early, she sat on the corner of her desk and said, "I can imagine you have many questions about sex and few people to ask. Is there anything you would like to discuss?" We were speechless so she continued to talk. We hung on every word.*

*Repressive attitudes about women's role in the home and workplace were obvious then as well. Girls had three career choices at that time – to be a nurse, a teacher or a secretary. If there was shortage of resources then boys would be supported to advance their education because women would most likely marry and stay at home. Attitudes have changed noticeably but the suggestion that "nice girls don't" and "girls are less*

*important” are still for many women like silent whispers inside the heart influencing our thinking and our behaviour.*

*What do I want to tell my daughter and other young girls about love, sex and marriage? Enough to fill a separate book, but I will confine my comments to the most crucial.*

*First, I want to say that beliefs and information about sexuality are issues that you teach your children through the years as they grow, just as you talk about other aspects of their mind and body, such as how to talk about their feelings or why it is important to wash their hands before they eat. It is essential to me not only that my daughter is given correct information and healthy attitudes but also that she or any other child has someone that they can talk to over time about their sexuality.*

*Attitudes toward love, sex and relationships are formed long before the teenage years. As parents or relatives, we may begin to focus more on discussing relationships and sexuality with a pre-teen or teen, sparked by the obvious physical and emotional changes they are experiencing; but many of their ideas are already shaped by the behaviours of friends, family and the community around them from the time they were born.*

*Dear Friend, I think that talking about teen attitudes toward relationships by focusing on the teen years is a bit like starting to read a book at the second chapter, so if I could I would like to digress and share with you some of my thinking on parenting and the development of the early years.*

*Parenting is one of those times in life when we show what we are made of, what is inside. I remember a presenter, talking about self-awareness, who asked an audience, “What do you get when you squeeze an orange?” to which the audience replied, “Orange juice.” And then she asked, “What do people get when they squeeze you?” Her point was that when we are under pressure, what is inside of us comes out, whether it is*

*anger, sarcasm, joy or love. The people who live close to us know what is inside of us because they are shaped by it. Certainly adults are affected by how you treat them; however the most malleable beings that we share our lives with are children.*

*Children come into the world with some pre-determined characteristics – some genetic and personality influences – but for the most part our children are blank slates. They learn who they are by what they are told by significant people in their lives. In the early years, up to about 7 or 8 years, they are not very capable of challenging the accuracy of what they are told about themselves so they take all the information in – good and bad, right and wrong. I don't mean that every small hurtful detail is retained, but children learn what those close to them think of them. This is how they form their opinion of themselves and their world.*

*For each of us, these beliefs of our childhood established the blueprint from which all our other relationships were formed. They are the foundational guidelines for how we give and receive love, how we behave in friendships and intimate relationships. Later in life as we grow and determine our own relationships, we are attracted to people who treat us in the way we expect to be treated. I remember a very well-educated friend saying to me that she had just ended a relationship with a guy who really cared for her because he was “just too nice.” I wondered what old programming she had been enacting.*

*In relationships, particularly at the beginning, we teach others how to treat us – and it is not always positive. Picture yourself in this situation. Recently you met someone of the opposite sex and you seemed to really enjoy each other's company. At a social function the person makes a derogatory sexual comment to you in front of others. Would you say*

*something about this incident to your friend? If that event is not addressed with that person, then you have just taught them that it is acceptable to speak to you in that way. What you accept is what you teach.*

*As a result of the messages our children have been given, they come into their teenage years with certain ideas about their value, how they deserve to be treated and therefore, what kind of relationship is familiar (but not necessarily healthy) for them. Although some attitudes have been established, I think that parents and other role models can still have a significant influence in the teenage years, more especially, when they are aware of this information.*

*Thankfully many parents and role models have moved away from not talking about sexuality at all. Others continue to focus on the singular event of “the dreaded sex talk” and still others feel fairly comfortable talking with their pre-teen about the beginning stages of puberty – periods, wet dreams, hormones, etc. And yet, as you have pointed out, there needs to be a balance between the discussions about the intricacies of sexuality and the dynamics of loving relationships.*

*Many of the technical details of sexuality you have covered well in your letter to your nephew. In addition to those facts I would like to add in a few suggestions offered to me when I taught nursing students by a very special group of teens – teen mothers.*

*I think that most of the things I learned about teen sexuality I learned sitting at the bedside of a thirteen year old who had just given birth. (That sounds like a great name for a poster on Teen Sexuality!) A number of years ago my dear friend, Joan Marie, and I co-taught obstetrics to nursing students. The patients who needed the most care were the very young teenage mothers. They were usually the most open*

*about how they got pregnant. The ways they had gotten caught were no different than other women who lacked education – they were just more memorable. There is something particularly shocking seeing a teen in labor who is so young that she is playing with her coloring book and crayons between contractions. It was equally heartbreaking to see them napping along with their babies, cuddled into their teddy bears, knowing that they would be going home soon to the responsibility of a newborn. You would watch their distress as they tried to sooth their fussy baby and do their hair because their boyfriend was coming with his buddies to visit. We referred to them as “babies having babies.” I asked a number of them, “What would you tell other teens about getting pregnant?” They said:*

*“You can get pregnant, without having intercourse.” Angelica was 13 years old and a virgin when she delivered! She and her equally young boyfriend thought that if they didn’t have intercourse they wouldn’t get pregnant, so they did “everything else but”. On several occasions, he came just outside of her vagina. She got pregnant two months after they had become sexually active.*

*“Withdrawal does not work.” Fourteen year old, Suzanne had been told by her older boyfriend that if he pulled out before he came then she couldn’t get pregnant. “I found out after I was pregnant that there is sperm on the head of the penis even before he comes.”*

*"I wanted to have a child to have someone to love only me!" Jessica, at 15, was visibly devastated that the baby was "so much hard work!"*

*"My boyfriend said that if I didn't have sex he would break up with me and tell everybody I had done it anyway." Ashley had missed her whole Grade 8 school year because she was not well through her pregnancy. We talked a lot about being in a relationship and having sex with someone who cares for you and respects you. She said she realized the importance of that now but it was a hard way to learn that lesson.*

*The intricacies of relationships are more complex and need to be approached on a situation-by-situation basis. Nonetheless, there are a few principles to keep in mind. The guidance and the guidelines are different for a 14 year old than an 18 year old. The younger the teen the less capable they are in handling the intimacies of relationships. Remember the 13-year-old mother who was a virgin when she delivered? Both she and her boyfriend had started dating – "Going steady", they said – when they were 12 years old. In my mind, 12 year olds are too young to be dating exclusively, if at all. At this age they are often in situations that are over their heads which they may not acknowledge because of their need to be grown up.*

*Because teens are often enthralled with the excitement of dating, acknowledging the joy along with the risks allows you to convey that you appreciate some of what they are experiencing. Sexual relationships that are respectful and caring are very nurturing and satisfying; therefore it benefits not only your bond with your teen but also their long term view of relationships if messages like these are communicated along with*

*the cautionary aspects of relationships. Respect and caring, to me, is the main message about these very foundational relationships.*

*Warmly,  
Bette*



CHAPTER EIGHT

## SEXUAL FANTASIES

Dear Bette,

The first time I became aware of the significance of people's fantasies in understanding their sexual personality was as a resident in psychiatry at Memorial University, Newfoundland. One afternoon Dr. Hoenig, who had a special interest in human sexuality, said that he was asked to interview a teenager who was caught having a sexual encounter with another boy in the school's washroom. The teacher felt he was gay and wanted him to get psychiatric help as he considered homosexuality a sexual perversion. Dr. Hoenig said that when he interviewed the student he found that the teenager was not homosexual.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because of his sexual fantasies."

"I do not follow."

"The student told me," Dr. Hoenig explained, "that he had been sexually frustrated because no girl would go out on a date with him. So while he was having sex with another

boy he was fantasizing about one of his female classmates.” Dr. Hoenig believed that the boy’s sexual fantasy reflected his sexual orientation more than his behaviour.

Over the years, as I listened to my patients’ fantasies, I found that Dr. Hoenig’s view was correct. Most behave in a way that is socially acceptable but in their private lives, they fantasize about their true wishes and desires, reflecting their true nature.

When I had open and honest discussions with people about their sexual fantasies, I became aware that they belonged to different groups that could be observed on a wide spectrum.

The first group fantasized only about their present lover. There were more women than men in this group and most belonged to conservative and traditional families.

The second also fantasized about their past lovers. Those who belonged here were generally liberal and could easily talk about their past love affairs. They had pleasant memories of their previous intimacies.

The third also fantasized about those they were attracted to but had never made love to them. I met many men who were fascinated by and attracted to their neighbors, colleagues and relatives but never expressed their romantic feelings to them. Many such connections were more than platonic but less than sexual, better described as being sensual.

The fourth group mostly fantasized about people they had never personally met. It included their favorite actors, actresses, musicians, artists or even center-folds of different magazines. Many were shy and did not feel comfortable approaching the opposite sex during their social lives.

The last group fantasized about those they had neither

met nor seen in pictures. They created lovers from their own imagination. Such people were generally shy but very imaginative.

Dividing people into different groups is not to indicate that they are mutually exclusive. They can, and usually do, belong to different groups at the same time. Such a description is an attempt to bring into focus different segments of people's fantasy life. I met many committed and faithful husbands and wives, who were very promiscuous and unfaithful in their fantasies.

I have also determined that some personalities are very private and never share their sexual fantasies with a close friend or lover. There are others who feel comfortable sharing sexual fantasies with a close friend of the same gender but not with a lover, and others are very open in discussing fantasies with their sexual partners. It was very interesting to find that sometimes the lover was uncomfortable listening to sexual fantasies especially if it included others. I gradually realized that in sexual relationships honesty may not always be the best policy. I met an Asian friend whose wife was devastated when he shared with her all his previous sexual affairs on their wedding night. He thought he was being honest (as it was an arranged marriage) while she thought he was cruel. I met a number of people who felt inadequate when their lovers shared fantasies about previous lovers. People who do not consider themselves good lovers and suffer from poor sexual self-esteem are especially vulnerable and become emotionally bruised with such knowledge.

It was quite interesting to see that there are those who did not feel guilty about their fantasies, as far as they did not act on them, while there were others, who had grown up in a very religious, conservative family and culture, felt

extremely guilty as they considered fantasizing about other men and women very sinful. I met quite a few guilty men and women who lost their sexual passion over the years. Many such men gradually became impotent and many women frigid. They lived in sexless and loveless marriages because they could not resolve the conflicts between their fantasies and their day-to-day realities.

It is also amazing to note how people's fantasy life changes from adolescence to old age as they change their sexual lifestyles. When they get divorced, some lead celibate lives for a while to recover from the loss, while others start dating right away as they cannot tolerate being alone. After a divorce from a twenty-year marriage, some prefer to date women their own age while others choose younger women. There are married men, after their wives became overweight and wrinkled, stop fantasizing about their wives and start fantasizing about young and attractive women. Some go so far as to start having affairs with younger women.

I've met those who, after having a stable marriage and family life for a few years, adopted a homosexual lifestyle. When I inquired about their fantasy life, they stated they always knew they were gay, but lacked the courage to come out of the closet and married to conform to family expectations, I've also met women who discovered a lesbian lifestyle after they unexpectedly met and fell in love with a very special woman. They were as surprised in their change of fantasy life as I was. I realized that the fantasy life of women, alongside their sexual orientation, was more adaptable than men. Many women and men have surprised themselves to discover during their adult life that they were bisexual.

I was also fascinated by the changes in the fantasy life

of immigrants. I met a number of Asian men who used to fantasize about Eastern women when they were teenagers but after coming to the West and dating Western women, their fantasy life changed and their ideal loved person underwent a cultural transformation. Such a phenomenon is quite frequent in mixed marriages. It was interesting that many had not realized the change until I asked them such questions specifically.

After I became comfortable exploring sexual fantasies within my patients' life stories, I used them as a part of marital and sex therapy. I realized that many sexless and loveless couples had stopped fantasizing about their spouses. I encouraged them not only to go on weekly dates but also to fantasize about their spouse once a week when alone. It was rewarding to see that as they regained their sexual interest in their partner they could act on their fantasy life. Many needed marital therapy to resolve other emotional conflicts but the fantasizing technique was helpful to regain an emotionally and sexually satisfying relationship. How interesting it was for me that most women's fantasies were romantic, involving long walks, candle light dinners and slow dances, while most men's fantasies were more erotic and focused on the sexual act. It was important for men to learn the significance of romance and foreplay in therapy to regain their sexual lives. They had to realize that for their spouses, hugs, kisses, and cuddles were as important as sexual encounters.

I think a fantasy life needs more space in the books of human sexology and psychology than it has been given in the past. It is a special key in understanding people's true nature and the motivation in their intimate relationships. I feel that knowing who people fantasize about might be

more revealing of their sexual character than who they sleep with in their real lives. Fantasies are the windows to the heart and deserve more attention than they receive. Once they become aware of the significance of their fantasies, they become empowered and gradually realize that by changing their fantasy life they can learn to grow personally and improve the quality of their love lives.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## SEXUAL FANTASIES IN THERAPY

*Dear Sohail,*

*My first reaction to the concept that individuals' fantasy lives reflect their sexual orientation was one of enthusiasm and intrigue. I realised that it could have significant clinical value when working with individuals who were struggling with confusion about their sexual orientation.*

*It wasn't long after I read your letter that I had the opportunity to pursue this concept further. I received a call from the father of one of my former clients. He said, "Bette, I am wondering if you could see Cassidy again. She has been extremely anxious. She hasn't been sleeping or eating for the last month. We are so worried about her. When you saw her 4 years ago (when she was 14), she really felt good about the work you did together. She won't tell me or her mother what is wrong but she says she will tell you." I agreed to see her that week.*

*When I had seen Cassidy previously we had indeed worked well together. She had quite a severe anxiety disorder and was negatively focused on her relationships with her friends – concerns about not being liked or included. She enthusiastically embraced a combination of Cognitive Therapy and Assertiveness Training and responded beautifully within three to four months.*

*This time when Cassidy came to my office she was extremely distressed and obviously had not been sleeping. She started by saying that her life was over and I would not like her, she was a bad person. After some reassurance, Cassidy informed me that she thought she was a pedophile. When I asked her how she came to that conclusion, she said that*

*several months previously she had been on the internet going into educational websites that dealt with teen sexuality. Eventually over time she followed the links to other sites and she found herself in sites that focused on stories describing sexual encounters with teenagers. She found it arousing and would go into these sites periodically. She emphasized that she was only interested in sites for teenagers focusing on education about relationships and sexuality. Subsequently, she realized with a shock that the stories that she had been reading involved 8 and 9-year-old children. Since she had found it arousing before she realized the subjects' ages, she felt that she was a pedophile.*

*I completed a thorough assessment, including questions about her sexuality. I remembered your comments about sexual fantasy so we talked about this in some detail. She reported that she only fantasized about boys who were her age or older. Cassidy is gradually dealing more effectively with her anxiety and her sexuality. Since her actions were unintentional, I was able to reassure her that I did not consider her to be a pedophile. We have had a number of very detailed teaching sessions about sexuality in the teenage years so that Cassidy did not have to go to the Internet to get information.*

*I found the five groupings related to the focus of fantasies interesting as well many of your other observations. It would be fascinating to find there is a sixth group of people who do not fantasize at all. I also wondered about the impact on the stability of an intimate relationship when one or both partners do not fantasize about the other or consistently fantasize about other people. It will be interesting to pursue these issues in our clinical work in the future.*

*Warmly  
Bette*



CHAPTER NINE

## THE DARK SIDE OF LOVE

Dear Bette,

Is jealousy a normal or an abnormal feeling?  
Is it an expression of affection, caring and love or a  
reflection of immaturity and insecurity?

These are some of the fundamental questions that we face when we discuss the issue of jealousy in a serious fashion. There are probably as many points of view as there are thinking people. Some believe in the German proverb that says, "Where there is no jealousy, there is no love." Others agree with Havelock Ellis who characterized jealousy as, "That dragon which slays love under the pretence of keeping it alive." Most of us may not agree on the definition, nature and dynamics of jealousy but it is quite apparent that jealousy is a complex feeling with many colors and shades.

I personally think that jealousy is the only feeling that can be called a Triangular feeling. All other human feelings are either personal in which another person is not directly

involved, for example feelings of tiredness or sadness, or they involve two people, for example, feelings of affection, caring and anger. Jealousy is the only feeling in which three parties are involved, for example a woman who feels jealous because her husband is showing interest in another woman. So in this regard jealousy is far more complicated and multifaceted than many other feelings.

As we pursue jealousy deeper and try to understand jealous people, the relationships in which they get involved and triangles they tend to make, we realize that what we see clinically or socially is usually the tip of the iceberg and there are complex dynamics that lie beneath the surface.

In my clinical practice I have seen patients in whom I feel that jealousy was a reflection of personal insecurities. They generally had poor self-confidence, poor self-image and poor self-worth. They did not like themselves and were not proud of what they did. They felt either unattractive physically or uninteresting as a person.

In many cases they had a poor self-image even before they entered into romantic relationships. Their insecurity spilled over and they were feeling insecure about their relationships. They needed an abundance of reassurance and if their partners could not offer that constantly they felt very uncomfortable. It was hard for them to accept the reality that their lovers found them interesting and exciting.

Many were preoccupied with the following concerns:  
“I don’t know what he/she finds interesting in me.”  
“I’m not sure why he/she goes out with me.”

When feelings of this type of insecurity are pervasive in the relationship, they act as dry hay and it does not take long to spark the fire of jealousy. Depending upon the inten-

sity of such feelings, even minor incidents or casual interaction with other men/women can precipitate a crisis. Most of the jealous people I met exhibited two distinct characteristics in their personalities:

- comparing themselves with others. It is generally very hard to discuss other people with those that are jealous without them comparing themselves to others in a negative light. Jealous people have a tendency to feel inferior to others.
- an inability to share their loved ones with others. Jealous people are usually very possessive and use the word “my” emphatically. “She is MY girlfriend.” “He is MY husband.” This emphasis is a subtle warning to others as if they are saying directly, “Stay away from him or her.” I pondered on whether unresolved sibling rivalry as a child and an inability to share one’s parents’ affection with other siblings, was an important factor in experiencing jealousy as an adult.

When I ask what precipitated feelings of jealousy, they narrated a wide range of behaviors in their lovers that made them extremely uncomfortable, such as:

*“When he talks to other woman at the party and then leaves me alone I feel jealous.”*

*“I don’t mind her talking to other men but when she dances with them I feel jealous.”*

*“It’s not the fast dancing; it is when she dances slowly with other men which I cannot tolerate.”*

*“I hate when he comments on women’s boobs or buns and legs when we go for a walk.”*

*"I get nervous when she tells me that the actors on television are hulks."*

*"I don't mind him interacting with women in my presence but I can't tolerate him going out with his colleagues for a coffee after work."*

*"She can go for cup of coffee but when they go for a beer I get uncomfortable. I don't trust alcohol."*

*"I don't mind him going to lunch with his female friends but when he invites women for dinner I get suspicious. You know what these candlelight dinners are like. They encourage intimacy."*

*"It was not that he had dinner with another woman, it was that he kept it a secret that bothered me."*

*It was not only interesting to know what precipitated feelings of jealousy; it became significant what people did when they were experiencing those feelings. When I asked what kind of behaviors their jealous lovers exhibited, people shared a range of reactions:*

*"I came back to the table where my friends were sitting after the dance and she was gone. I felt embarrassed."*

*"When he feels jealous, he becomes quiet and doesn't talk to me for days."*

*"I complimented a woman on the dance floor; she started to yell and created a scene."*

*"She got so upset after my female colleague called me at home, that she did not sleep with me for a week."*

*"He got so mad that he insulted me, hit me and left bruises on my arms."*

*"She started an argument and then we got into a fighting*

*match. We hit and bit each other and later I had to be treated at the hospital.”*

*“He got so violent that he broke the coffee table and threw things out the window. I had to call the police.”*

*“I ignored it a few times but the last time when he accused me of sleeping with other men and hit me on the head, I had to charge him with assault. He’s on probation now.”*

*“He got so angry that he threatened to kill my boyfriend. I told him that I wanted out of the relationship and if he wanted to kill my boyfriend, he had to kill me first.”*

As we try to understand the dynamics of relationships in which jealousy plays a major role, we become aware that on the one hand, jealousy might be a symptom of personal insecurities, while on the other hand, it might reflect a lack of trust in the relationship, desire to control the other person, poor boundaries in the relationship or an attempt to avoid intimacy. That is why when a management plan is tailored for clients, we have to decide which aspects of the clinical condition are part of the personality problems and will be dealt with in individual and group therapy, and which aspects of the problem are related to the relationship and need to be discussed jointly.

During individual or group therapy sessions with jealous people we focus on the following issues:

- **Improving Self-esteem** – It is amazing to see how insecure many are who accuse their lovers and spouses of paying too much attention to other people, and being unfaithful. During therapy it is expressed that until they

feel good about themselves and enjoy what they do, they will have great difficulties in enjoying any relationship.

They are encouraged to look better, dress more attractively and even lose weight if that is significantly affecting their self-esteem. Others are encouraged to attend support groups to improve their self-confidence. Some are helped to take part in a hobby or sport for recreational purposes. It's exciting to see that once they start liking themselves and enjoying their lives they become less sensitive to what their lovers say or do.

- **Learning not to be Oversensitive** – In therapy, the jealous are made aware that many things in life and in their relationship have no direct relevance to them. Being over-sensitive or taking things “personally” does not help. They learn the role they play in maintaining tension in the relationship by asking unnecessary questions of their lovers. The lovers of jealous people find themselves in a no-win situation. When they answer questions honestly the jealous person gets more upset and uses that information as ammunition for future arguments; when they are evasive they are accused of being dishonest and creates even more suspicion. We help jealous people to think twice before they ask questions which sow seeds of doubt and future misery in their relationship.

A common observation is that jealous people are so overly sensitive that they have difficulties differentiating between flirting and unfaithfulness. We discuss this issue openly and highlight that for their spouses or lovers to complement others on their looks, clothing or personalities while with

them is different than secretly getting telephone numbers, making dinner dates or arranging weekend trips.

It is highlighted in therapy that jealousy clouds one's judgment, making it difficult to differentiate between reality and fantasy, and it can border on paranoia. Perhaps that is why famed author Lawrence Durrell wrote, "It is not love that is blind, but jealousy."

During our therapy with jealous people we also involve their lovers or spouses to give them support. The lovers are encouraged not to get defensive when they are accused by their jealous partners, but to learn to maintain composure and offer reassurance. Reassurance usually calms the jealous mate more than being defensive. If the spouse feels under too much pressure from the jealous one then they are encouraged to discuss issues in therapy sessions rather than at home. Discussions in the presence of the therapist are usually more rewarding and less painful than the ones occurring at home. Once both parties learn to discuss their issues in a rational manner and resolve their conflicts they become free to discuss their issues whenever they choose.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## JEALOUS LOVERS

*Dear Sohail,*

*I have worked clinically with people and have known people socially whose struggle with jealousy has been a very painful and in some circumstances, an unrelenting aspect of their lives. The beliefs that lead to the feelings of jealousy seem to be very deeply entrenched. The jealous person's thoughts are interwoven with the perception of how they see themselves and how they think others not only see them, but feel about them as well.*

*Working with those who are dealing with jealousy has presented me with some of the most challenging clinical experiences of my career. To add to the challenge, my experience shows that these individuals often seek counselling after being prompted by their partners and not because they see the problem as theirs. Like all attempts at personal change that are undertaken to appease another, the effort can be half-hearted and not strong enough to come to grips with a problem of this magnitude.*

*The story of Jonathon and his wife Katie reflects this aspect of jealousy. They had struggled with jealousy in their marriage since it began 3 years previously. Jonathon, a 35 year old mechanic came to see me after Katie, a 30 year old teacher, called to arrange the appointment. He recalled that the relationship had begun as an affair outside of committed relationships in which they were both involved. "It was instant attraction!" They had their first date a few days after they met and were married within six months. Jonathon explained that he did not trust his wife because she had had an affair with him and sex on their first date. He believed that if she cheated*



on her previous partner she would cheat on him. He described her as “highly sexed” and “somewhat loose.” I remarked that since he was also a participant in these activities, would not the labels that he put on Katie apply to him? His response was that he was not going to be unfaithful but his wife was. It was difficult to focus Jonathon away from his wife’s behaviours; however he did feel that his wife “could easily have married someone better.” He acknowledged that he was insecure but did not believe there was any connection between his insecurity and his jealousy.

When I asked Jonathan what he saw as evidence that his wife was unfaithful, he recalled a recent scenario when he walked into his kitchen and found Katie with Ian, a mutual friend. He explained that he felt that he had interrupted his wife in the middle of a sexual gesture. When I asked what the gesture was, he replied, “She was stretching” (then demonstrated a stretch that one would do upon getting out of bed in the morning). He went on to say that, “She intended to touch Ian in a sexual way as she extended her arm to stretch.” When I inquired how he knew what she was intending, he said, “Last week, she stretched like that and grabbed me.” Jonathon’s jealous thoughts permeated most of their lives. He monitored Katie’s clothing, her car and her schedule for inconsistencies and confronted her on any discrepancies he found. When I spoke with Katie during the initial referral she said that she loved her husband and was dedicated to their marriage. She found his jealousy stressful, was seeking counselling and wanted him to do the same.

It is not surprising that the characteristics that you observed as being associated with jealousy (comparing oneself to others and difficulty in sharing) are characteristics that I have primarily associated with low self-esteem. The two main

*feelings underlying jealousy are worry and fear, usually fear of abandonment, which is one of the most intensely, deep-seated and debilitating feelings. These individuals feel justified in holding on to their irrational beliefs more intensely than other problem thinking because they feel they are protecting the relationship. They think that if they trust their partner and stop their vigilance, in other words, stop protecting the relationship, then something will surely happen to end it.*

*With the many complex angles of the “jealous triangle”, a comprehensive treatment approach is needed. Your suggestion of individual, group and couple therapy would be a powerful combination in addressing this difficult problem.*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

## UNFAITHFUL SPOUSES

Dear Bette,

Is faithfulness in intimate relationships  
a myth or a reality?  
Is infidelity a curse or a blessing?

These are some of the common questions all therapists face when dealing with couples struggling with extramarital affairs. But when we initiate a discussion on the issue of faithfulness in intimate relationships we cannot ignore the social and cultural expectations of different societies.

It appears that for centuries faithfulness was considered a virtue in intimate relationships. The concept of monogamy was associated with the concept of normalcy, health and maturity. Extramarital affairs were considered immoral, unethical, illegal, and socially undesirable. Infidelity was considered a valid reason for divorce legally, religiously and socially.

We study the evolution of monogamous lifestyles in different cultures from a sociological perspective because even today there are number of cultures in different parts of the world where monogamy is not a communal standard.

Human beings are probably the only species on this planet who choose to be monogamous for decades. We have evolved to a stage where we have established the desirability of monogamous relationships and taken steps socially to ensure that people do not indulge in extramarital affairs.

When we try to understand the pressures that stop spouses from stepping outside the marriage, we find a wide

range of religious, legal and social mechanisms in different societies to prevent this from happening.

Religious and legal systems have legislated that when one of the spouses indulges in an extramarital affair then the marriage is dissolved since infidelity is accepted as a valid reason for divorce. In other cultures human beings have established their social lives in such a way that men and women are socially segregated throughout the reproductive lives (from puberty to old age). In those societies:

- *boys and girls attend separate schools*
- *dating is prohibited*
- *families arrange marriages for their children*
- *brides and grooms are expected to be virgins*
- *there are no mixed social gatherings*
- *workplaces are segregated.*

Everyone of these customs are adopted to insure monogamous relationships and prevent extramarital affairs.

Keeping these trends in mind one wonders whether faithfulness is a myth or a reality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially in secular and liberated communities. Although each couple and each extramarital affair is unique, we have observed in our clinical practice certain patterns. In couples, most that are dealing with extramarital affairs could be divided into three groups:

- Acute Crisis (one time incident)
- Chronic Dissatisfaction in the relationship
- Lifestyle Conflict

This differentiation not only highlights the differences in dynamics but also provides some guidelines for the length, intensity and nature of therapy.

The first group, the couples in Acute Crisis, are often quite healthy, have a good relationship and exhibit mature communication styles. They face a crisis when one of the spouses indulges in a brief sexual encounter outside of the marriage. Although the couple goes through a painful and traumatic phase, gradual healing occurs and life goes on.

Matt was such an individual, happily married for 20 years. He told me how he went to a conference in Los Angeles and met a woman. They “had a few drinks and landed in bed together.” He felt so guilty that he told his wife the day he came home. She was upset for a few weeks and forgave him but he could not forgive himself.

As we started therapy, I found he had no intimate relationships before being married and although he was happy in his marriage he still had an unconscious desire to know what it would be like to make love to another woman. Since this desire produced a lot of guilt feelings, especially knowing that his wife was faithful, he had never acted on this urge. But once an opportunity arose far away from home he got involved in the brief encounter.

A few months of therapy helped him understand his lifestyle and deal with his guilt feelings. He acknowledged that he was very fortunate to have a wife who was understanding and supportive. Since their relationship was quite healthy and strong, it could recover from the crisis without breaking or being permanently damaged.

The second group consists of couples who have been facing significant problems in the relationship for a number of years and have been experiencing dissatisfaction. These

spouses were in love at one time but gradually regressed to a lifestyle where they did not share affection and could not deal with their differences or resolve their conflicts. Gradually their marriages became loveless. According to Benjamin Franklin, "Where there is marriage without love, there will be love without marriage." In these situations, an affair is usually the last straw that breaks the marriage or forces couples to deal with the underlying conflicts.

The third group consists of couples in which the spouses have different lifestyles. One spouse believes in and practises monogamy while the other practises polygamy. In most cases, the polygamous spouse does not share information about the extramarital affairs. Usually the relationship experiences tension, anger and resentment but the conflict is never discussed openly until a crisis develops. Such a crisis might be precipitated by one of the spouses or even by the third person who is having an affair with one of them.

It is a belief that extramarital affairs stabilize as many marriages as they break. In many cases, the spouse who was always polygamous believes and makes their spouse believe that after marriage they would change their lifestyle and remain monogamous. But after a few months – or years – that spouse returns to the previous lifestyle and that change is never discussed or dealt with in the context of the relationship.

Therapy focuses on the conflict and highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship. It is important to assess the expectations, strengths and limitations of the monogamous spouse. The goal of therapy is to either resolve the conflict or, if one spouse cannot accept the other's lifestyle, then help them dissolve the relationship

and re-establish a lifestyle that is more realistic to their personalities and expectations in life.

It is remarkable to see how therapy can help monogamous spouses to accept their partner's choice or decide to remain friends but go their separate ways romantically. Therapy can be a liberating experience for both and indirectly to the third party as well, the lover that one of the spouses or the therapist may have never met.

I use a variety of interventions with couples who are dealing with infidelity, however there is one technique I have found very effective and I thought you would find beneficial in your clinical work, I call it *celibacy by prescription*.

The first time I shared with my colleagues, who had been doing individual and relationship therapy for years, that I sometimes prescribe celibacy to individuals and couples as part of therapy, they were extremely surprised. One of them said, "Don't you think that is controlling their sex lives?"

"No," I said, "It is suggested in order to improve their personal and romantic lives."

"And how does celibacy do that?"

"By providing them with an opportunity to do some soul-searching."

Since we did not have much time we did not pursue the issue. After a few months some of my colleagues asked me to explain the rationale behind my prescribing celibacy.

I used a story of a little boy who, after getting twenty-five cents from his Mom, ran to buy chewing gum. While running down the street he tripped and his quarter was lost in the mud. His friends came running to help pick him up then saw the quarter lying in the mud. None wanted to dirty their hands so each one went home and brought a bucket

of water. They poured water from those buckets one by one but that did not clean the quarter. It just made more mess. Finally the boy's father came and asked,

“What's the matter, Son?”

“My quarter fell into the mud.”

“And what have all of you been doing?”

“Pouring water on it to get it clean.”

The father asked his son to return home and bring a glass of water. While the little boy was returning with it he was wondering how a glass of water could help the matter while buckets of water only made it worse. But he knew that his father was a wise man with a wise answer. When the boy brought the glass of water his father bent down, picked up the quarter with his thumb and index finger, and poured the water over the quarter and his fingers. The quarter became shiny and clean. He dried it with his handkerchief and gave it to his son. The boys were surprised at the ease of cleaning the coin.

While I was telling this story, my colleagues were as surprised as the boys must have been and wondered what that story had to do with prescribing celibacy. Then one started smiling. He knew what I was getting at as he told the rest that celibacy was a way of getting the person out of the mud, their confused state. The single glass of water – a few months of celibacy – can resolve issues more efficiently than pouring on buckets and buckets of therapy for years onto their mess.

With most couples who visit a therapist to deal with the issue of faithfulness or unfaithfulness, one spouse is monogamous while the other is polygamous/polyandrous and they cannot resolve the conflict. The monogamous spouse, usually the woman, believes that since she is faithful to her



husband he should be faithful to her, too. He believes, however, that his occasional romantic encounters with other women are no indication that he does not care for or love his wife and feels that she should not overreact to the situation. To prevent that overreaction and to avoid undermining the relationship he might not tell of his extramarital encounters to his wife. She then accuses him of being dishonest. He insists that he is not dishonest; he is only sharing half of the truth.

When spoken to separately he would invariably say, "I am an honest and sincere person. I am honest with everybody else except my wife, the woman I love the most." He believes that honesty will cost him his marriage. He feels that his wife cannot digest the whole truth. He believes that if his wife could accept him for what he is and not see his encounters with other women as a negative reflection on their marriage, then he could be fully honest with her. He insists that is not the affair that ruins the relationship; it is her awareness that undermines. To protect the relationship he feels he must keep her in the dark. She insists that dishonesty is worse than unfaithfulness. So both spouses continue to play their roles until they reach a stage where it cannot go on any longer and either the relationship breaks down or they see a therapist.

It is usually at this juncture, when one spouse, usually the husband, is not only sexually active with his spouse but also romantically or sexually involved with other women, that I suggest a hundred days of celibacy for soul searching. This gives both parties an opportunity to review their relationship and their lifestyle in a calm manner so they can make a decision that they can live with comfortably in the future.

Celibacy can play a significant role in therapy because it can be helpful in many ways:

- It can eliminate the need to be dishonest or partially honest, which can facilitate the transition towards greater honesty and hopefully, resolution of underlying issues in the relationship.
- The spouse who has been involved in extramarital affairs has a new role in celibacy. It can allow the person to step back and review with greater clarity the other roles he/she had been assuming (i.e., husband/wife, father/mother, lover, etc.).
- It can be seen as a form of penance and encourage the other spouse to be forgiving thus motivating the couple to move toward a different mind-set in the relationship.

Therapy sessions, together or separately, focus on three areas:

- reviewing the past
- making choices for the future and,
- discussing different concepts about relationships.

When reviewing the past of the relationship, it is usually helpful to determine the following:

- when monogamy started
- when monogamy ended
- why monogamy ended (unmet needs, differences in attitudes, etc.)
- why there was no resolution of the problem within the relationship.

When I discuss the choices of both spouses in individual sessions, I tell the polygamous/polyandrous spouse that they have three choices:

- Restore the existing relationship to its original premise. This assumes that both parties see monogamy as an intrinsic part of how they will interact and are willing to compromise towards mutual-need fulfillment. The question in these situations is not only whether the person *wants* to do it but also whether they *can* do it. I have seen enough couples to say that when a person is determined to change his/her attitude and lifestyle and does not want to lose the relationship that is so cherished, monogamy can happen. Either one may need support and encouragement, especially at the time of crisis, but if that is provided the outcome is usually favourable.
- Leave the relationship and enjoy the lifestyle chosen. They might be lucky to find others who feel the same way about relationships and therefore may not be in conflict.
- Ask their spouse to accept them for what they are and acknowledge that they either do not want to or cannot change their attitude and lifestyle and hope that their spouse can learn to live with it comfortably. The request would be for a reconstituted relationship with polygamy as an acceptable behaviour.

The monogamous spouse has three choices:

- Work toward restoring the existing relationship to its original premise. This assumes that both parties

see monogamy as an intrinsic part of how they will interact and are willing to compromise toward mutual-need fulfillment.

- Leave the relationship and enjoy sexuality in whatever form they are comfortable with until a relationship presents itself in which monogamy is an intrinsic and lasting part.
- Accept the reconstituted relationship with new rules where polygamy is an acceptable behaviour. Mutual decision-making is needed in terms of how the behaviour will be dealt with on a pragmatic level.

During my interviews I also discuss two concepts which usually help to clarify the situation and assist people to make decisions about their future and the future of their relationship.

I inform them that usually a monogamous person has a sexual relationship with their partner and all other relationships are platonic. When a monogamous person meets the opposite sex they make it very clear that they are not available for a romantic or intimate relationship. On the contrary, a polygamous/polyandrous person has a number of relationships that are sensual, in that the door to romance is intentionally left open. Those types of relationships have potential to become sexual at a future date.

Very openly and candidly, I say to them that if they want to change their lifestyle, they have to learn to close certain doors. It is during this phase that a few months of celibacy is very helpful and therapeutic. That gives the person time and space to close the doors of sensual relationships already existing and prepare mentally to keep these doors

locked in the future so the transition of lifestyle is more gradual. The person goes from being polygamous or polyandrous to becoming celibate and later to a practising monogamous lifestyle. Those few months of celibacy also assures that the monogamous spouse is serious about the relationship.

For some, the role of sex is predominantly for relationship and reproductive purposes and if those needs are met, they can enjoy recreational sex with the person with whom they have a special relationship. But for others, sex can be purely recreational and to enjoy it, they don't need to be in any special relationship involving deep feelings of caring, affection, love or commitment.

I have found that discussing these concepts helps spouses clarify their expectations from themselves and each other. I sometimes ask people to give me their choices in writing with their own reasons and provide the following questions to guide them:

- *are you a monogamous or a polygamous/polyandrous person?*
- *are your relationships outside of marriage platonic, sensual or sexual?*
- *do you enjoy recreational sex or would you rather be part of a special relationship to enjoy sex?*
- *explain any other choices in your relationship or in your lifestyle.*
- *are you willing to be celibate until you resolve your personal and relationship conflict?*

It is amazing to see how people in these situations decided the future of their relationships. A therapist facilitates the process and helps spouses reach the decisions that

they can live with, in comfort and happiness. A few months of celibacy can help in clarifying years of confusion – like a glass of water.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## PRESCRIPTIONS FOR UNFAITHFUL SPOUSES

*Dear Sohail,*

*Your discussion of the issues surrounding unfaithful spouses and your recommended treatment approaches, in particular celibacy by prescription, was compelling, detailed and innovative from a clinical and even personal perspective. The categorization of the couple's patterns in extramarital affairs was helpful in shedding light on this stressful time in the life of a relationship. Your recommendations provide direction and possibly prediction of the likelihood of successful resolution.*

*Dealing with an extramarital affair is one of the most dreaded, possibly the most painful experiences for people in an intimate relationship. It is an event laden with a multitude of intense emotions, such as anger, guilt and betrayal. The affair is often viewed in a very personal manner. Some ways in which a spouse behaves can be viewed as representing them and them alone, for example, being an introvert or extrovert. While other behaviours, such as infidelity, are more likely to be taken personally by one's partner. Even with counseling, it is challenging for the spouse who was "cheated on" to be able to view the behaviour of their spouse with some objectivity and not take it as a personal affront. Couples and society believe that an affair not only communicates something about the unfaithful spouse but says something very derogatory about what that person thinks of their partner. Moreover, a sexual relationship outside of marriage can do considerable damage to the trust which many people consider to be the backbone of a committed relationship.*

*There are a small number of individuals who have reflected on their personal values and have consciously decided to embrace a polygamous/polyandrous lifestyle. However, more men become polygamous, or in the case of women, polyandrous, sometime in the life of a relationship that was initially expected to be monogamous. Often an individual may have been through a number of committed relationships which ended in extramarital affairs before they see their behaviour as a problematic pattern and seek counselling.*

*Brad was such an individual. He had been in four of what he thought would be long-term relationships that ended when he became intimate with someone else. He recalled with embarrassment, "I always intended to be faithful." When he came for counseling he had been in his present relationship with Ruth for nine months and they were talking about buying a house together in the next year. Brad recalled that when a relationship reached a point where it was becoming comfortable he became uneasy and began putting out feelers for interested women. He was very charming and handsome with a shyness that Ruth said that she and other women found enchanting, so he was very quickly in a compromising situation.*

*The dissolution of his previous relationships had had their financial and emotional price tag as well as their lessons. Brad was beginning to understand the reason for his affairs and the type of partner with whom he was most compatible.*

*In our first session he said, "I was unable to resist a woman who came on to me. If a woman seemed interested, even if I didn't find her attractive, I couldn't say no. How crazy is that? The more persistent she became the harder it was for me to resist. I dearly love Ruth and want to get off this roller*



*coaster. I want to marry her and be with her for the rest of my life. She knows about everything I have done in the past. She understands me, sometimes better than I understand myself. When I get cold feet she just gives me space. I know she is not giving me permission to have an affair but I don't feel smothered. It is funny that I find being pursued outside my relationship irresistible, but when it is introduced into my desired life, it is a real turn off."*

*I asked Brad if he would invite Ruth to our next session. She was an emotionally sophisticated woman who expressed herself well. She explained that she loved Brad and knew the risks inherent in the relationship. She intended to support him to achieve his goal of being monogamous but she made it clear that they would only be friends if that goal was not achieved. With her support and blessing we were able to work through Brad's long-standing feelings of inadequacy and need for attention. We used the lessons obtained during the exciting but painful experiences of multiple affairs to help him develop enough emotional wisdom for them to be happy together.*

*Brad's story represents an affair from the male perspective. He represents that portion of men who express as their motive for being unfaithful a need to feel that someone finds them attractive and cares about them. I have generally found that more men, or at least as many, would say that they were unfaithful because they did not feel satisfied sexually in their marriage.*

*What about the female point of view? Cecile is an attractive, young professional who owns a successful business. I have been seeing her in counseling on and off for several years. Recently, she has been trying to come to terms with an affair she had and I asked if she would write about her insights.*

*"I like to think I'm a nice person, a moral one, but I've had two affairs, one that started my marriage and one that ended it. I'm not proud of those facts but they remain just that, the facts. And so I am left to deal with the consequences of my behaviour, the emotional fallout and the pain. Why, you might ask? My husband did. My family. My counselor. I have asked myself that question a hundred times. Why? Why? Why? I thought about it, talked about it, dreamt about it and analyzed it – to death! Here's what I think. The first affair started because of low self-esteem. I was never very confident and even less so around men. If they were married however, I felt safe to be myself. And they liked me! I should have gotten the message. Instead I pursued a relationship with a married man and we fell in love. Yes, I felt guilt and shame because of the affair, but being single and unattached, there were few consequences for me. I didn't get to experience first hand the devastation I'd helped create. If I had, I am certain the second affair would never have happened. So why did it? Contrary to popular belief, it wasn't for the sex!*

*Communication had broken down in my relationship. I felt lonely, neglected, abandoned and second to his career. I felt inadequate because I couldn't seem to be happy. I didn't think I could tell him this without sounding selfish, needy and unsupportive and I resented it. All of it! So when another man offered me caring, nurturing and support I was attracted. When he told me I was the most important thing in his world, I thought, finally I am a priority in someone's life! That made me feel good about me. My needs – attention, support, understanding, and acceptance – were being met and it was intoxicating. I also think I wanted to end my marriage and believe it or not could see no other way to do it. I think the affair was a means to an end.*

*Was I thinking clearly? Did I grasp what the consequences of my behaviour would be? Hell, no! It is very difficult to see the situation clearly when you are on the inside looking out. Would I change things if I could? Without a doubt! I realize now that so much of how we behave, react, act out, is directly related to our perception of the situation. And there is nothing like a divorce to change your perception.*

*An affair happens for many reasons: sex, boredom, loneliness, the list is endless I am sure. But ultimately, it's because our needs are not being met and we don't trust our partners to meet them. Quite possibly, they are unable to do so. For women, especially, I believe these unmet needs are emotional in nature. Perhaps, if I had been more confident, been more able to meet some of my own needs, or at least have the courage to be honest about my feelings, this would not have happened. At the very least, if there had been more honesty, I would have handled the situation with more integrity. Hindsight, they say, is 20/20. It is my wish that with the benefit of my experience, someone else may gain just a little insight."*

*Cecile's story suggests that a woman's basis for an affair leans more toward the satisfaction of emotional as opposed to sexual needs. My observation that sex, although it may be enjoyable, is rarely the reason women give for having affairs.*

*I would like to go back to your letter and finish off by highlighting several of your other observations. "Some people believe that extramarital affairs stabilize as many relationships as they break," got my attention. Although it doesn't justify an affair, it may offer some explanation as to why we see marriages lasting for years, even though one person is having an affair and why when that affair ends the marriage dissolves as well. It's akin to sawing off the third leg of a three-legged stool.*

*I would also like to comment on your brilliant concept of “Celibacy by prescription.” Now I understand what you meant in Chapter One when you referred to 100 days of celibacy. The goals that you said this technique could achieve, such as eliminating the need for dishonesty, allowing time for clarifying roles or even as a form of penance, seem quiet achievable and therapeutic for the individuals and the relationship.*

*It certainly can be a mechanism of emotional cleansing and an opportunity to clarify one’s feelings. The old saying, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder,” comes to mind. The period of celibacy can allow an individual who is in a relationship with several people to realize for whom the heart grows fonder! It also removes sex as one of the ways in which a couple relates and allows them to focus on the other ways in which they are bonded – if any.*

*As a therapist, it provides another layer of information about the dynamics of the relationships – the marriage and the affair. In addition, a hundred days of celibacy would demonstrate the individual’s dedication to the resolution of the problem, since I would think that it would take considerable commitment for an individual who is sexually active with two or more people to be celibate.*

*Since we have touched on the issue of therapy, can you share with me some of your experiences working with men and women in your psychotherapy practice?*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

CHAPTER TEN

## **I / WE PEOPLE**

Dear Bette,

One of the observations I have made over the years about people involved in intimate relationships is that some feel complete on their own and relationships simply add to their sense of well-being, while others feel complete only when they are part of an intimate relationship. I call them “I” and “We” people. The dynamics of their relationships depend upon the personalities of those involved. I will share my point of view through two letters, the first one about a friend of mine who is a “We” person and the other about a man who is an “I” person. These letters shed some light on the personalities and their relationships.

Dear Jennifer,

I understand you were once again feeling sad and depressed, melancholic and broken-hearted because your dreams of a romantic, stable and secure relationship fell

apart. You are once again trying to find something to do on the weekends by yourself or with friends, who are like fixed deposits in your life, always there whenever you need them because they believe a friend in need is a friend indeed. Sometimes we do not appreciate those all-weather-friends when we are happy, in love and euphoric but miss them when we are down and depressed.

I have to say that although I am sad about what has happened in your life once again, I am not surprised. I thought it was inevitable, merely a matter of time until each of you went your own way because I felt that you operated on different wavelengths. As we discussed at our last dinner, there are two kinds of people:

**I People:** People who want to be alone and feel happy, satisfied, comfortable and secure by themselves. If they have a friend, lover or spouse they are happier but even if they lose them they manage on their own.

**We People:** People who feel incomplete when they are alone and always wish and need to be in an intimate relationship.

When an “I” person meets a “We” person then the relationship is basically incompatible. As long as the “We” person does not demand too much from the “I” person, the relationship goes on; but the moment the “We” person expects to change the “I” person into a “We” person and starts talking about commitment, togetherness, living together, marriage and family, the relationship faces a crisis. Then it is only a matter of time before the relationship either dissolves or ends in an angry or hurtful separation.

I experienced that phenomenon in my life for years. It

took me a long time to realize that I was an “I” person but all the women I had gone out with were “We” persons and sooner or later they expected and hoped that I would change and give them what I was not able or willing to give.

I do not know why most of the women I know are “We” people and most of the man I know are “I” people. The question I always asked myself was, why would an “I” person choose a “We” person to date with when it will ultimately lead to heartache? I don’t know the answer. I think they choose each other because the “We” person brings security into the relationship while the “I” person brings enjoyment and satisfaction because most “We” persons I know are home bodies. They like to stay home, watch TV and enjoy relaxing while “I” people are social and want to be active.

The interesting thing is that most of us, in spite of all the knowledge and experience we have, don’t know what we want, or else what we want is not what we need. So we face an ongoing conflict – if we get what we need we become bored and what we desire does not fulfill our needs. We as human beings want opposite and contradictory things. We want all of the qualities in the same person. Maybe that’s why many North American men and women have polygamous lifestyles so they can fulfill their contradictory needs and desires with different people.

I think when you are with a “We” person like your ex-husband, Jason, you get bored, and when you are with an “I” person who is quite exciting you wish to change him. You want satisfaction and security both, and I hope you find them one day. But then you would have to have a custom-made lover! I haven’t met very many men who will fulfill both of those criteria. So the dilemma continues.

I wrote this letter because you may need it again in the future – not only you but also many other women friends I know who have been going through the same cycles again and again. The names of the characters change but the story remains the same. So this letter is to all the Jennifers of North America.

One of my friends, Salman, told me of the I/We dilemma of his relationship with Barbara.

“I had known Barb for six years and for the last three years we were married but the relationship did not work and we parted a few months ago. I felt sad. I was disappointed. I loved the woman. I still love her but we could not live together.

“It took me a long time to realize that we were fundamentally different. I used to believe that when two people lived together they could make anything work. Maybe I was idealistic. Maybe I was a romantic. But now I am becoming realistic. I am realizing that between Barb and me there were some fundamental differences, differences that could not be reconciled. Our personalities were worlds apart, so we had to end our relationship.

“I have tried to articulate the differences many times before but I have not been very successful. I will try once again.

“For me, the individual was more important than the intimate relationship but for Barb the relationship was more important than the individual. We all carry our crosses alone. We are born alone and we die alone and throughout our life we have individualized consciousness. All our excitements and pains, ecstasies and despairs are primarily



personal. Some we share with our loved ones and they become part of a certain segment of our life but that segment is usually small. They all travel for only a short distance on our marathon of life.

“Barb believed that that’s how single people think but when they get married, then they stop thinking as I all the time and instead think as We. I never learned to think as We.

“When we both lived in separate apartments I was happy, but Barb was not. She wanted to live together. I was reluctant but finally I gave in. Before Barb moved in I told her that I would like to have a separate room in my house with my own bed and books and she was allowed in that room only when it was okay with me. She thought it was strange but accepted the condition. She was so excited to move in with me that she considered it a small price. I also told her that just because we were living in the same house that did not mean that we had to sleep together every night. She was upset about that too but reluctantly accepted it.

“After she moved in she was thrilled for a few months. It was the honeymoon period. She felt the togetherness but soon realized that it was an illusion. I could not offer her what she wanted. She was disappointed. I was also disappointed but for different reasons. I always felt that either she did not understand me or she attributed meaning to my behaviour that did not belong there.

“She’d get upset that I introduced her as Barb rather than my wife. For me her individuality was more important than her relationship with me. She believed that I did not want other women to know that I was married. She also resented that I did not wear a wedding band. I always felt that it was silly and stupid to announce to the whole world

that you were married. I saw wedding bands as the remnants of chains.

“Barb was also disappointed that I brought her presents that were personalized and never brought her household things. She was really interested in furnishing and decorating the house. I never objected to what she did but never showed any enthusiasm. She used to get frustrated and accused me of not having nesting behaviour. I used to tell her that “My room is mine and the rest of the house is yours.” She did not like that. She wanted me to be proud of all of the household things. I said that I was proud of her whether we lived in a hut or in a palace.

“I told her that I grew up in a working-class family in India. My dad was a laborer in a factory. We were so poor that six of us lived in a one bedroom house. We did not have many material goods but we had a lot of love and affection. Now that I am rich and successful and earn hundreds of thousands of dollars I still have no attachment to material goods. I value people not material things. But Barb never understood that. She saw me as an uncaring, insensitive and self-centred person.

“The thing that bothered Barb the most was my not sleeping with her every night. There were nights I wanted to sleep alone and Barb resented being alone on those nights. She would do everything and anything for me not to go to my bedroom. She would request, beg and plead that she was nervous sleeping alone. She accused me of rejecting and abandoning her. I explained to her that I wanted privacy, space and time for myself but she never understood. She’d say, ‘All married couples sleep together,’ and I used to respond, ‘That’s why many of them don’t make love to each other for months. It becomes a routine and finally

boredom takes away all the excitement and fun of sharing the night with someone.'

"Barb said that I was ego-centric, crazy and eccentric. She could not understand how I could love her and still want to do so many things alone. She could not accept that I was an artist at heart and needed personal time to think and create.

"Finally one day when I came home she had her belongings packed. She told me, "If you can not sleep with me every night then I am leaving. If I have to sleep alone then I can do that at my parents' place. I hate sleeping alone and I can't tolerate knowing that my husband is sleeping alone in his room. It makes me feel awful and unloved.

"I tried to share my feelings and beliefs but to no avail. I told her that we loved each other out of freedom and free choice and not out of obligation. I told her that when people try to control their loved ones and try to change them, love gets suffocated and then dies.

"She told me that I was being too rational and philosophical about life and was intellectualizing the relationship. When she was leaving the house she said, "Salman, I need a husband, not a roommate," and walked out.

"I never saw her again.

"I still miss her and love her and feel sad that our marriage did not work out but I still believe that we all have to carry our crosses alone irrespective of our living arrangements and marital status. I hope one day she will appreciate that we all love in our unique way."

Such a story to dwell on.

Affectionately,

Sohail  
**WE OR I**

*Dear Sohail,*

*Your observation that there is a tendency for women to be “We” people and for men to be “I” people is an interesting proposition and one that I have observed as well. From my perspective, we are talking about the very core of how men and women have been socialized. These mindsets have been cultivated historically as men and women have been taught their roles in the world. Women were shaped emotionally to think about the tribe, the family and the group, ahead of, or if she was lucky, in addition to herself. At one time this was a very necessary component in society to ensure the health and growth of the family unit. At the same time men working away from the home, were able to be more self-focused, to become “I” people.*

*I know a number of women – friends, colleagues and clients – who, at their core, are “I” people and struggle to live their lives in ways that reflect this. Recently, I saw a new client, Susan, who would describe herself as an “I” person. Additionally she is highly accomplished in her career. Her children are bright and happy. They themselves are independent and have a number of hobbies and sports in which they do well. Within her family, her drive and independence is accepted and nurtured. And yet, that is not often the case outside of her family.*

*Susan recalls, “When I decided to seek counselling because my husband and I were having some difficulties, a number of our friends and family were quick to say, “I am not surprised, you travel so much, you work so hard, it was only a*

*matter of time before your independent lifestyle would catch up with you. I don't know how your poor husband tolerates it." It didn't matter that the difficulties they were experiencing were not related to her independence but to a traumatic loss her husband had experienced. She was seeking counseling to support her husband through this loss as compassionately as possible.*

*The support for "We" people to move toward "I" or visa versa and thereby behave in ways that are more congruent with who they want to be, is inconsistent in the family and in society. So as we encounter women making the journey from "We" to "I" or men making the journey from "I" to "We", we need to understand how monumental that journey is and how much support may be needed. Just as importantly, we need to appreciate the education and the change in attitude that is required. We have so few images or descriptions of what healthy intimate relationships or families look like. The picture of health in this regard is even more out of focus when we consider the impact of divorce and stepfamilies.*

*Your stories of Jennifer and her partner as well as Salman and Barb were equally sad. When individuals, like Salman and Barb, who love each other deeply, but are unable to negotiate a secure and loving relationship, it is particularly heartbreaking.*

*If we are to learn from these experiences, let's just consider for a moment some of the dynamics in more detail by discussing Salman's need and request to have his own room and library and to sleep there by himself from time to time. I want to clarify that we are assuming that sleeping alone to create, was not a euphemism for spending the night on the internet looking at pictures of naked women, because that would not be respectful of Barb.*

*In the world of the “We” people, sleeping in separate beds is strongly associated with the message that “something is not right in our relationship, it is not secure”, while in the world of the “I” people the message is, “Our relationship is important, but my time to myself is important as well.” Sleeping in separate beds is one of those behaviours that can give a positive or negative message about the health of the relationship.*

*My observation is that the “We” and “I” perspective is on a continuum and both men and women identify themselves at some point along this line. My sense is that individuals move along the continuum toward either end as they grow emotionally or are traumatized.*

*What is your view of the concept of the continuum? If you do agree that “We” people and “I” people are at opposite poles, then is health for both males and females somewhere in the middle?*

*You have mentioned that you have seen more women that are “We” people and more men that are “I” people. Can you comment on those women that you have seen who are more “I” persons and men that are more “We” persons? And finally, I would love to know your views on how we can help people to move toward health and happiness in their relationships, toward a balance of “We” and “I”.*

*Warmly,  
Bette*

## LIFE TRANSITIONS

Dear Bette,

Your letter is very thought provoking and moves me to review my concept of “I / We” personalities and their intimate relationships. I had conceived this concept nearly ten years ago when I was writing my book about mixed marriages. Over the years my observations and experiences led me to modify and expand the range of the concept.

I agree with you that “I/We” personalities are not water-tight compartments. They are on a continuum and the healthiest people are those choosing the middle. I have also come to the realization that people’s personalities, attitudes and lifestyles change over the years. I have met women who had “We” personalities in their twenties and thirties (primarily focusing on marriage and family) and then became “I” personalities in their forties (going back to school to pursue careers). On the other hand I met many men who had “I” personalities in their twenties and thirties (primarily focusing on their professional development) and then became “We” personalities in their forties (spending more time with their spouses and children).

It is ironic that when men develop as “We” people, that change is quite welcome, but when women transform from “We” to “I” personalities, it creates a major crisis. Many women find it hard to balance their family and professional life. In such cases I usually invite the husbands to discuss the changes and hope they can readjust to the next developmental stage in the family life. In some cases I have been able to help to dissolve conflicts, while in others the marriage fell apart.

Many couples who do not have positive role models in their families need professional help to balance their personal and relationship growth. It remains ironic how men and women have been socialized for centuries to play certain roles in their relationships and families. Now that those traditions have been challenged and changed in the last few decades in the Western world, many men find it hard to adjust to those changes. They seem to be out of touch with changing social and political realities. Intimate relationships are at a cross-road. This subject is so important that I think we need to have a separate discussion at some later date.

Thank you again in helping me broaden and enrich my concept of “I / We” People. Your comments made it more dynamic, flexible and meaningful. I am impressed how we complement each other in so many ways.

Affectionately,  
Sohail



## **MEN AND WOMEN ON THE HIGHWAY OF LIBERATION**

Dear Bette,

The social, economic, religious and political changes of the last century have not only changed the psychology of men and women but also transformed the dynamics of the intimate relationships between them. One of the most significant developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Women's Liberation Movement. When I studied the literature created by Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Bouvoir and many other feminist from the West along with the writings of Ismat Chughtai, Kishwar Naheed, Ishrat Aafreen, Fehmeeda Riaz, Farogh Farahzaad and other feminists of the East, I became aware of the struggles of women individually and collectively. Those writings made me very sympathetic to women's suffering. Such sensitivity helped me grow as a person as well as a therapist and over the years a number of female therapists have referred female clients to work with me in psychotherapy so as to improve their self-esteem and the quality of their intimate relationships. Working with these women and listening to their stories helped me appreciate their dilemmas and develop insights into the mysterious relationships between men and women.

Many women writers that I read have tried to get in touch with their innermost feelings of hurt, anger and resentment that they had been harbouring for decades in their personal lives and for generations in their familial and communal lives. They have chosen to share them with

others through their writing, a form of communication much more lasting than the closed ear of a spouse or relative.

Meiling Jin wrote,

*My poems are all jagged at the edges  
Because I am a woman  
Who is jagged at the edges  
I speak of only what I know*

Zhana shared on behalf of millions of women experiencing anger,

*Anger is something I can see, touch, taste  
It comes in many forms, ranging from mild  
irritation  
to overwhelming blind fury.  
Heart pounding, blood rushing, orgasmic anger.  
I am not angry. I am anger. I have become anger.*

After realizing the intensity and pervasiveness of those sufferings, many women tried to change their conditions. Some of them focused on changing the social, economic and political traditions that were unjust, prejudiced and unfair. Those movements helped women to achieve their legal and political rights. There were other women who focused on the psychological damage that had happened to women by working to strengthen their sense of self worth, self confidence and self image. Some not only became isolated from others but also became alienated from themselves.

Dorothea Smartt wrote,

*Part of me  
Is a stranger to myself*

*Dead  
To myself  
I cannot hear the rhythm of my body  
Do I even know how to listen?*

Anais Nin wrote extensively in her diaries about the psychological journey of a woman to liberate herself. She believed that political and social changes were *good* but not *good enough* to liberate women. Women have to work harder to believe they are equal to men as human beings and reverse generations of conditioning that they are second class citizens who are inferior to men. Nin also recognized that some women have to go through psychotherapy to improve their self-esteem and develop healthy intimate relationships. She also realized that for women to work in isolation without getting men involved in their struggle for liberation in the long run is not healthy.

Although I feel that the Women's Liberation Movement has been very significant in raising the social consciousness of men and women all over the world, I also feel that it has not fully resolved the ethnic, class and cultural contradictions that directly or indirectly affect the gender struggles. I feel that women all over the world can be seen on a broad spectrum.

On the one extreme are millions of women who are not fully aware of their role in life as second class citizens. Then there are women who have gradually become aware of their status in life but feel very resentful, angry and bitter. Their anger, whether it is against men, families or religious and cultural/political institutions, makes their lives very painful. Even the differences of opinion between different feminist groups can become an additional stress. When I asked a group of angry black working-class women

whether they felt more sympathetic towards white women, black men or Chinese working-class women, they looked at me quite perplexed. Some stated they had never thought about that issue. It is not uncommon for class, religious and ethnic differences and conflicts to undermine the collective gender struggle.

On the other end of the spectrum are those enlightened women who have reasonably resolved their contradictions and have gone beyond the negative, angry, painful and suffering phase. They have found healthier and more constructive alternatives in life. Some are creative and dedicated enough to organize communal activities, whether in education, art or the cultural/political realm to achieve higher levels of existence. Those women who have reached that stage are secure enough to include sympathetic men in their struggle. Many second generation feminists belong to this group.

It is also fascinating to note that while women in Europe and North America are preoccupied with their economic, legal, political and sexual orientation rights, women in Asia and Africa are still struggling with the basic issues of education, voting, and freedom to choose a life partner or work outside the family home. Many are frightened that they might be stoned to death if they get involved in pre-marital sex with men they genuinely love, while others struggle with the atrocity of sexual mutilation.

The more I study women's literature, the more I feel that the real struggle is between those, primarily men, who want to maintain the status quo and those who want to improve the individual and communal lives of women. I agree with Jo Freeman, who has beautifully synthesized the feminist perspective:

*“The traditionalist notes historically women have always had less power, less influence and fewer resources than men and assumes that this must accord with some natural order. The feminist perspective looks at the many similarities between the sexes and concludes that women and men have equal potential for individual development. Differences in the realization of that potential, therefore, must result from externally imposed restraints, from the influence of social institutions and values.”*

Those involved in psychotherapy and genuine soul searching achieve that goal at an individual level while education and political struggles try to move there at a social level by offering new role models and paradigms.

While I met many women socially and professionally who had difficulties relating to men socially and romantically, I also came across many men who felt lost and confused relating to women, especially liberated women, as they did not know how to communicate and relate to them. The rules of the game have changed over the decades, but most men who grew up in traditional families are not aware of the new expectations and have a hard time following them. That is why I feel that a new dialogue has to take place between men and women to establish and create new traditions and new rules that are mutually respectful and are born out of a genuine respect and understanding between people who care about and love each other. Such a process has to take place between individuals as well as groups, organizations and communities.

In the last two decades I have met men in my personal and professional lives, who felt quite confused while nego-

tiating their social and romantic relationships with women. Let me share with you a personal example to highlight this dilemma. Whenever I have lunch or dinner with female acquaintances and friends, I am never sure what to expect.

Some are quite traditional. They believe that if I invite them for lunch or dinner, then I should pick them up, pay for the meal and drop them off home at the end of the evening. They do not believe in sharing the cost and are quite firm and rigid about this. Many believe that the Women's Liberation Movement backfired and women lost more than they gained in the process. They feel their grandmothers were more respected in society than they are presently. Not only are they comfortable but quite in favour of well-defined roles in relationships. They will often comment, "We love it when men open doors for us and treat us like ladies." They believe that liberated women who are struggling to be full-time workers, mothers and housewives are trying to be superwomen, that they are acting unnaturally and are making a big mistake. They hold them partly responsible for their misfortunes. I personally feel such women are prisoners of the past and are not willing to evolve and accept changes that are being fought for by the few.

A group of female acquaintances and friends are at the other extreme. They are obsessed with the concept of 50 / 50 and believe that because they are liberated and equal to men, they should carry their own burdens. They proudly say that they do not want to exploit men. This preoccupation with equality results in complicated negotiations every time we are at dinner. Many say, "You pay for lunch this time and I will pay for it next" or, "You pay for yours and I'll pay mine" or, "Divide equally including the tip." We sometimes count pennies in front of a waiter, which I find embarrassing.

With some I feel that instead of a genuine human interaction based on caring, warmth and affection, the *love model*, the relationship has adopted the characteristics of the *business model*. I feel that these women have become prisoners of liberation. They interpret the concept of equality so rigidly that it creates unnecessary and unnatural hurdles. I call them pseudoliberated.

Fortunately I have female friends, like you, who have evolved beyond rigid traditions and are more open and flexible in their thinking. They feel that who pays what, when and how much is less important than the human beings involved, their feelings of comfort and respect and what they can afford. I'm most comfortable with them. We don't have rigid rules and expectations. We don't follow who should pay, rather we follow who feels like paying and if one does not have the money, one does not feel embarrassed asking the other to pay. Such an interaction is more comfortable for me and not much different than that with my close male friends. Such women are genuinely liberated and not bogged down by rituals.

It's quite ironic that it is almost impossible for me to have a genuine friendship with most Muslim and South Asian women I meet because their social behaviour is controlled by their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons.

The issues between acquaintances and friends become more complex when they become lovers. When I discuss intimate relationships with men, I find them also, like women, on a wide spectrum of thought.

On the one extreme are men who are quite traditional and have a macho image of themselves. These men are the product of a sexist and patriarchal society. They feel superior to women and behave as their bosses. They are generally

self-centred, selfish, narcissistic and controlling yet quite caring and charming – on their own terms! They generally have double standards (for example, many of them have extramarital affairs but expect their wives to be faithful).

On the other extreme are men who try so hard to be gentle and kind that they become placid and spineless. Their spouses may leave them, stating they were too nice. Superficially they seem very understanding but in reality they lack self-confidence and self-worth. It is very hard for women to have a genuine and honest relationship with them as they have a hard time making decisions or saying no. Their need to be liked by their spouses and lovers is so strong that they cannot be honest about their feelings. Many are abused by their wives and yet they rarely complain because of male pride. They are the opposite of macho men, letting women hurt and exploit them. They fail to realize that for a happy and healthy relationship both parties have to feel strong, confident and equal.

I've also met the pseudoliberated males who are prisoners of the 50/50 model and expect their wives to pay half of the bills even if they earn only half of what the husbands earn.

The liberation of men is quite different than the liberation of women. One fundamental difference is that when women become aware of their role as second class citizens in present society and looking back in history, they want to change themselves and their environments. Gradually they realize that by redefining themselves at personal, social and political levels they will attain a lot of power. So many women have become actively involved in the process and have succeeded in achieving some of their goals for themselves and their "sisters".



On the other hand many men are too timid, believing that if they redefined themselves, they would lose the control and power that their forefathers and now they have enjoyed for centuries. That is the major reason they are resistant to change. Only a few men I met can be considered to be genuinely liberated. They are Humanists and sensitive to inequalities in life. They realize that for centuries what they considered their rights were actually privileges – even unfair and unjust privileges. They know that our society has been so male dominated that most men are not aware of or ignore it. Such a bias exists in most aspects of our lives:

- *in religious circles, people call their God "Father",*
- *in families, women take their husband's name or retain their father's name. Children don't take their mother's name. This tradition makes practical sense since nobody can be one hundred per cent sure who is their father but everybody is sure of their mother,*
- *in common English language usage, the male pronoun is used for men as well as for women.*

Genuinely liberated men believe that relationships at a personal, social or political level need to be reviewed and changes made at every level so that men and women enjoy equal rights and opportunities. They know that sexual liberation is but one aspect of human liberation.

I have seen the process of liberation in men beginning in two different contexts:

- *as a positive or a negative response to the liberation of the women in their lives. (Such men realize that women they once associated with are changing and becoming independent and they have to liberate them-*

*selves to maintain a relationship. Some men succeed in that journey while others become angry and resentful. In many cases, the relationship ends poorly.)*

- *as a part of personal liberation. (This change is more natural and rewarding. Some men during their emotional growth realize that many attitudes they have grown up with were not very healthy and they must cast off these biases to gain a more mature outlook on life. These could include attitudes towards people from other cultures, religions and races. In this journey they also become sensitive to women's struggles and suffering. They liberate themselves by changing their attitudes towards themselves and others, including women.)*

To such men the experience of liberation in their relationships with women is a part of a larger experience of human liberation. Arthur Schlesinger in his article, *The Crisis of American Masculinity* wrote, "... if this is true, then the key to the recovery of masculinity does not lie in any wistful hope of humiliating the aggressive female and restoring the old masculine supremacy. Masculine supremacy like white supremacy was the neurosis of an immature society. It is good for men as well as women that women have been set free. In any case, the process is irreversible; that particular genie can never be put back into the bottle.... The key to the recovery of masculinity lies rather in the problem of identity. When a person begins to find out who he is, he is likely to find out rather soon what sex he is."

These men usually realize that this process of liberation is quite complex. It has intellectual, philosophical, emotional, social, religious, political, cultural and many

other dimensions and sometimes they are successful in one area more than others.

Changing oneself is more difficult than one realizes. Some men are successful on their own after a lot of soul-searching while others need professional help from a psychotherapist. I am fortunate to have been part of that journey with many of my male patients. It was a rewarding experience for both. I learned as much from them as they might have learned from me. I also met some men who were fascinated with the idea of liberation but once they found out the emotional price they had to pay for that change, they backed away. Others who had a keen interest and were genuinely motivated went through the process step by step and finally achieved a richer quality of life and more rewarding intimate relationships.

We are reaching that cultural stage in human evolution where women are discovering their masculine side and men are getting in touch with their feminine side. More and more men and women are achieving a balance of power in their relationships. Many couples are able to redefine their roles and negotiate their expectations as equals in their relationships. They are able to be friends as well as lovers and bring out the best in each other. I strongly believe that growing together is better than growing alone. I hope our book will be a gift of love for our readers, helping them travel a few steps in that direction.

Affectionately,  
Sohail

## A CREATIVE FRIENDSHIP

*Dear Readers,*

*It has been a privilege to write this book with Sohail, my dear friend and colleague of 25 years and to share with you our inner thoughts, some professional, others personal. When Sohail and I met in Newfoundland in the late 1970s we experienced an instant bond of friendship and professional respect.*

*We worked together primarily in the Ambulatory Care Department of the Waterford Hospital, the provincial psychiatric hospital in Newfoundland where I was a Psychiatric Nurse and Sohail was a Psychiatric Resident. At that time a Day Hospital Program had been developed based on the cutting-edge concept that intensive therapy with clients provided during the day was a more beneficial, cost-effective alternative to 24 hour institutional admission. The leaders – Psychiatrist Dr. Ashok Malla, Manager Judy Power and Joan Rowsell, a visionary leader who at that time was the Director of Nursing – shaped the program around the philosophy of respect for all clinical disciplines and the commitment to enhancing the knowledge of each practitioner. Sohail and I shared an enthusiasm for learning and growing in this incredibly stimulating and rewarding, growth-enhancing environment.*

*In conjunction with the other professional staff, we offered individual therapy and various approaches to group therapy. As well, Sohail and I had the opportunity to work with couples who were having difficulties in their relationships. After each therapy session with a couple and at other times through the day we would retire to the cafeteria for a passionate discussion of the previous session. And, of course milk and cookies – our reward for a job well done. We would reflect on the dynamics*

*of the session, the helpfulness of the therapeutic approaches we had used and how effectively we were working together. We eagerly extracted every bit of learning out of each experience in an attempt to unravel the mysteries of relationships. Even then we were not beyond proposing our own theories of human behaviour. Little did we foresee that years later we would be sharing the evolution of these theories with you.*

*Sohail and I frequently considered the intricacies of healthy and unhealthy communication and agreed that individuals communicate with words and in silence. This aspect of relationships was wonderfully brought through in our friendship. We were not only able to laugh and talk, but it was surprising to me that early in our friendship we were able to easily be silent in each other's company. My fondest memories are of the time we spent in the Ambulatory Care Department in my office. It was a large room in the old part of the hospital with huge windows and very generous window sills. Sohail would sit in the window for hours reading the latest words of psychiatric wisdom and I would work on an equally compelling project. Periodically we would exchange comments and then with ease go back to our respective interests. I had never had that level of comfort or lack of pressure to talk so early in a friendship.*

*When Sohail and I reconnected in 2001, I was delighted to find that we could still laugh, talk, enjoy energetic discussions about our philosophies and clinical experiences, yet still communicate in silence. My reaction to his invitation to undertake this joint writing venture was mixed. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work with such a noted author. As well I had written many articles for professional journals and felt strongly that more nurses should share their ideas in writing. And yet, I felt somewhat overwhelmed by a project of this*

*magnitude and the challenge of articulating my ideas. How quickly, my sense of adventure and the excitement of working with my dear friend again overcame my concerns!*

*The use of letter writing as an avenue of dialogue about clinical issues intrigued me. I wondered what it would be like to also use it in my clinical practice and began introducing letter writing to my clients. Many were used to journaling and bringing their journal entries to our sessions for discussion. They were pleased to have a written response that they could review and consider over time. I often use stories as a way of highlighting a point in therapy and I included those stories in my letters. As one of my clients said, "I love your stories, they really help me understand and apply more fully the idea I am working on."*

*Another client whom I saw at a social function long after our therapy sessions had ended said, "I don't remember what we talked about but I remember all of your stories." For people who have difficulty remembering what happens in therapy sessions, letter writing helps them retain that information.*

*Sohail mentioned in his first letter that through this project we were building bridges between two friends that had a number of differences between our disciplines and personal outlooks:*

- **Profession**

*When Sohail gave me a gift of his book From Islam to Secular Humanism it was the beginning of another chapter in our philosophical discussions. It is vital that professionals of different disciplines engage in on-going dialogues about their differing theoretical perceptions, not only about clinical matters but also about philosophical issues. This builds both our personal and professional knowledge base.*

- **Culture**

*As technology shrinks our world, an understanding of other cultures allows us to enjoy the richness of other nations and as well helps us to appreciate their hardships and unique views. In the area of health care, particularly psychiatry, we need to increase our awareness and sensitivity to cultural influences. I felt that I knew a great deal about life in an Eastern culture from numerous conversations with Sohail over the years but I learned so much through this current process and realized how much more there is to understand.*

- **Gender**

*Any vehicle that allows men and women to talk respectfully as equals is invaluable. In this project it was easy for me to discuss issues with Sohail that I have found difficult with other men. Sohail has a well defined, unshakable respect for people, particularly women and their insights and perspectives.*

*As we exchanged letters it became clear that Sohail had thought deeply about his therapeutic encounters with his clients over his many years of practice. I realized that he was sharing the searching soul of a therapist, family member and friend. Through this process he had given birth to original ideas and techniques. A number of concepts genuinely impressed me. His view of the business and loving relationship model and the technique of celibacy by prescription are just two of the many that stand out.*

*Throughout the evolution of this book, I have grown as a person, mother and therapist. When I committed to writing my ideas I became aware of the wealth of knowledge that I had accumulated through several decades of counseling with indi-*

*viduals and groups. As we talked about our other interests we realized that we wanted to co-author yet another book based on my experiences of working with individuals and groups in the workplace.*

*Being a prolific writer, Sohail had started a series of self-help relationship books, the first of which was entitled The Art of Living in Your Green Zone, followed by The Art of Loving in Your Green Zone. Using the same philosophy, our joint project is the third book in the series, The Art of Working in Your Green Zone.*

*Any project done with a friend has the added dimension of familiar comfort and the excitement of getting to know that person at a deeper level. As with all of our endeavours this book was an insightful, educational and enjoyable experience permeated with an atmosphere of respect and fondness.*

*I hope you enjoy the fruits of our loving labor and that you find suggestions that you may use to guide you on your path to wisdom in love, sex and marriage.*

*Sincerely,  
Bette*



## REFERENCES

### CHAPTER 3

Duffy, A., & Momirov, J. (1997). *Family Violence: A Canadian Introduction*, Toronto: Lorimer.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Bette Davis** RN BN MN

---

The President of Bette Davis Consulting and Counselling Services Inc., Bette Davis has worked over 20 years in the area of mental health/psychiatric nursing as an individual and group therapist, manager and clinical teacher.

She specializes in Stress Management, Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, Time Management and Personal Effectiveness with staff and managers in the public and private sectors.

Her special interest is in the relationship between balancing home and work life and workplace wellness. She has written on issues related to personal and professional development, has presented numerous workshops and is a founding member of a number of professional and community organizations.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr. K. Sohail** FRCP(C) MBBS

---

Dr. Sohail is a psychotherapist providing guidance to many who use his original concepts to bring themselves into better life of balance and effectiveness. He has written books on diverse themes including poetry, short stories, true crime and self-help, and has contributed articles to numerous magazines and newspapers. His lectures and seminars at provincial, national and international conferences are called “noteworthy” by his peers.

The Creative Psychotherapy Clinic in Whitby, Ontario, led by Dr.Sohail, has become a successful, ever-expanding practice because of the innovative techniques he has introduced through his lengthy career as a healer.

Embracing the humanist philosophy that guides his life, Dr. Sohail is admired for his leading-edge therapy by his patients, health administrators and colleagues across North America.

Besides being a prolific writer on topics he knows so well, he produces TV and film documentaries through his company, Darvesh Films (Canada) Ltd. on issues of a social and psychological nature. He acknowledges being on a personal journey that has no ending in his thirst to know more about the art of healing and helping others to grow happier.

Publications from Dr. Sohail's Library

**BOOKS**

(also available on CDs)

Interviews

*Library Encounters*

Marital Therapy

*Growing Alone –*

*Growing together*

Poetry

*Pages of My Heart*

Psychotherapy

*Encounters with Depression*

*Schizophrenia ...*

*Accepting a Challenge*

Psychotherapy,

Immigrants

*From One Culture*

*to Another*

Psychotherapy, Group

*Strangers Care*

Short Stories

*Mother Earth is Sad*

Sociology

*Mixed Marriages*

**VIDEO**

**DOCUMENTARIES**

Domestic Violence

*Encounters*

*Breaking the Cycle*

Marital Problems

*Growing Alone –*

*Growing Together*

Mixed Marriages

*Intimate Encounters*

Mixed Marriages,

*Children of*

*Mixed Messages*

Psychotherapy

*Encounters with Depression*

## **A MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER**

Bette Davis, a well known lecturer and consultant on mental health issues, has joined with Dr. K. Sohail to bring to those who are willing to choose a new opportunity to change their lives, to accept new knowledge that will take their personal lives forward.

Between these two authors, using their varied experiences, studies and humane qualities as healers, they show in easy-to-comprehend correspondence that open and simplify how one can look at one's disappointments and defeats. How to bring oneself back on track, or as in other situations to move themselves forward to become a productive, happy person at work and elsewhere is their goal. Marriages and friendships can be saved.

White Knight Publications' purpose is to create and publish socially valuable books that bring information, solace and assistance to its readers, providing them with greater satisfaction. We trust our contribution to offset the painful drift of society toward its uncaring "netherlands," where nobody is concerned, is of greater value than that sought elsewhere.

This publication will help those, who are seeking a new direction, to find their motivation between these covers.

Bill Belfontaine  
Publisher  
White Knight Publications

## BOOKS BY WHITE KNIGHT PUBLICATIONS

### BIOGRAPHY

- *The Unusual Life and Times of Nancy Ford-Inman*  
– Nancy Erb Kee

### GAY ADOPTION

- *A Swim Against The Tide*  
– David R.I. McKinstry

### INSPIRATION– SPIRITUALITY

- *Conscious Women — Conscious Lives*  
– Darlene Montgomery
- *Sharing MS (Multiple Sclerosis)*  
– Linda Ironside
- *Sue Kenney's My Camino*  
– Sue Kenney

### PERSONAL FINANCES

- *Don't Borrow Money Until You Read This Book*  
– Paul Counter

### POETRY

- *Two Voices — A Circle of Love*  
– Serena Williamson Andrew

### POLITICS

- *Turning Points* – Ray Argyle

### RELATIONSHIPS – MOTIVATION

- Books by Dr. K. Sohail and  
Bette Davis RN MN
- *Love, Sex and Marriage*
  - *The Art of Living in Your Green Zone*
  - *The Art of Loving in Your Green Zone*
  - *The Art of Working in Your Green Zone*

### TRUE CRIME POLICE

- *"10-45" Spells Death*  
– Kathy McCormack Carter
- *Life on Homicide*  
– Former Police Chief  
Bill McCormack
- *The Myth of The Chosen One*  
– Dr. K. Sohail

---

### *Recommended reading from other publishers*

#### HISTORY

*An Amicable Friendship* – Jan Th. J. Krijff

#### RELIGION

*From Islam to Secular Humanism* – Dr. K. Sohail  
*Gabriel's Dragon* – Arch Priest Fr. Antony Gabriel  
*Pro Deo* – Prof Ronald M Smith

#### DREAMS

*Dream Yourself Awake* – Darlene Montgomery

New topics are published every Spring and Fall

# Love SEX & MARRIAGE

It is a rare book that reveals both the personal and professional lives of two trend-setting psychotherapists. Dr. Sohail, founder of the Creative Psychotherapy Clinic in Central Ontario and Bette Davis, a highly-experienced lecturer and therapist, share their fascination with the mysteries of intimate relationships. Their letters to each other highlight the richness of their personal observations, social experiences and professional insights into many aspects of human bonds including dating, marriage, divorce and sex education for the next generation.

Throughout, they challenge our cultural and religious biases and question many outdated traditions, taboos and myths about human sexuality. Their letters reflect a humanistic attitude towards romantic relationships, which they believe builds bridges between cultures, religions and genders. They also share how they have helped their clients deal with issues like jealousy and unfaithfulness.

These letters will help readers to achieve a better understanding of the psychology they need to apply to improve the quality of their intimate relationships and help their children make wise life choices. A wealth of original concepts and romantic wisdom. A book for lovers of every age.

Other books by Dr. Sohail are listed inside. We particularly recommend any one of the three in Dr. Sohail's and Bette Davis's "*Green Zone Living*" series.

Visit the Green Zone Living  
website at [www.greenzoneliving.ca](http://www.greenzoneliving.ca)

Relationships, Social Issues, Sex  
ISBN 0-9730949-9-0  
US \$13.95 CAN \$19.95

White Knight Books  
[www.whiteknightbooks.ca](http://www.whiteknightbooks.ca)  
Printed and Bound in Canada  
Cover design by Karen Petherick

ISBN 0-9730949-9-0



9 780973 094992