

Masters Center For Transformation

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FOUR STAGES OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

The first stage: ME-CENTERED

This is an ego-run arrangement, with the egoity of one partner usually dominating or controlling that of the other. Each partner's bottom-line credo, however well camouflaged, basically is: "What's in it for me?" Some people may appear to be more selfish, more full of themselves, but others, perhaps nicer or more passive or more accommodating, are still obeying (however indirectly) a what's-in-it-for-me dynamic, if only to ensure or reinforce their security.

There's not much ongoing intimacy here, but there may nonetheless still be times of profound connectedness, union, and love—that is, elevated *states*—the presence of which may create the illusion that the couple is doing better than is actually the case.

In me-centered relationship, there is little or no intimacy with the various factors that together make up the relationship. We might, for example, know next to nothing about our anger (its signs of arising, its originating factors, its behavioral manifestations, and so on), even though we are frequently angry. By contrast, in an awakened relationship, intimacy is cultivated with each partner's anger—and also with every other aspect of the relationship—as well as with the relationship as a whole.

Monogamy at this stage is very immature, held in place through a power dynamic rooted mainly in fear and obedience. Non-monogamous urges are only superficially curbed and are, whether acted out or not, often indulged. Betrayal of the relationship, whether through sexual or emotional affairs or pornographic obsession, is common.

The second stage: WE-CENTERED CODEPENDENT

This stage is not without me-centered tendencies—for each stage transcends the previous one while also *including* it, however peripherally or slightly—but it is not so readily run by such tendencies. Here in the second stage, equality is valued but often *overvalued*, so that differences tend to get flattened, marginalized, or drained of vitality. The couple is now not so much two cults of one under the same roof as a cult of two against the rest of life.

This is not always as isolated as it sounds, however, for the boundary or relational “membrane” around the couple may be somewhat permeable. Nevertheless there is a strongly guarded separation from whatever exists outside their coupledness. Within their self-contained world, they negotiate over what would seemingly best serve their relationship—they as individuals are important, but their relationship is much, much more important and is treated as such. It is their security, their sanctum, their shell of immunity, and whatever might threaten it from within usually is defused, diplomatically and otherwise.

Monogamy at this stage is also immature, held in place by a power dynamic rooted in exaggerated or force-fed tolerance (usually shared equally by both partners). Non-monogamous urges are generally curbed, muted, or repressed, at best being only vicariously indulged. Outright betrayal of the relationship is uncommon; the betrayal that *does* occur is mostly a betrayal of the potential of each individual for the sake of the safety and comfort provided by their relationship.

The third stage: WE-CENTERED CO-INDEPENDENT

At this stage both partners make a priority of maintaining their individuality. Negotiation over differences is still commonplace, but there are more interpersonal risks taken. Tolerance is not so rigidly enforced. Autonomy, though much more adult here than in me-centered relationships, is often given too much weight. There usually is insufficient vulnerability between the partners. And though there is more passion here than in we-centered codependent relationships, it is not often permitted full expression. Promiscuous urges are usually not indulged (as in the first stage) nor suppressed (as in the second stage), but rather exposed and discussed in a way that does not significantly threaten the relationship. Affairs still happen.

Monogamy here is starting to shed its immaturity; there is some sense of a deeper kind of relationship, with some steps toward that perhaps being taken. What needs to be surrendered at this stage is each partner’s over-attachment to autonomy and their aversion to deep connectedness (which they tend to associate with romanticism or neurotic fusion).

The fourth stage: BEING-CENTERED

Although at this stage we know ourselves to be beyond the previous three stages, we do not look down upon them (doing so would be a first-stage habit) and do not even want to, for we choose intimacy with *all* our qualities, however dark or immature or unappealing. We recognize that all the qualities that characterize early stages of relational intimacy are, to whatever degree, *part* of us. Rather than trying to transcend these qualities, we cultivate *intimacy* with them,

so that they are not only included in our being but are known from deep inside.

Monogamy at this stage is clearly and stably awakened, possessing an integrity that's firmly rooted in shared love, shared power, shared depth, shared presence. Non-monogamous urges present no problem, because they have all but ceased to exist; there is simply no interest in them (at the same time, however, there is great, ever-deepening passion). Betrayal also has ceased to exist, the very seeds of it having no soil from which to sprout.

Monogamy now is not so much a choice as a profoundly obvious and sacred *given*. Finding freedom *through intimacy* is a living reality at this stage, consistently and naturally and fully participated in by both partners, because they have reached the point where there is no real alternative to doing otherwise.

For those in being-centered relationships, the limitations of monogamy are not entrapping but profoundly liberating.

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