



*Section One, Lesson Four:*  
*Projection*

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## *The Most Essential Element in Healing from Anxiety*

Understanding projection is KEY to healing from relationship anxiety. As long as you believe that the problem is your partner you will remain stuck in the loop of intrusive thoughts and exoneration of responsibility.

Here's the nutshell of this course, which you will read and hear repeatedly as you work through the material: *The anxiety has nothing to do with your relationship but is a projection of your internal states of disequilibrium.* When you're off-kilter inside, you will hyper focus on your relationship, and often that's the clue that you're off-kilter inside. Therefore the single-most important step in breaking free from anxiety is understanding, naming, and then reeling back in the projection. Your partner is the screen onto which you're projecting your shadow states: the parts of you that you've disowned, judged, criticized, and shamed. Projection, in this sense, is a GIFT because it alerts you to the fact that there's something very important inside that needs your loving attention.

The awareness that the ability to pull back the projection is the most essential element in healing from anxiety hit me full force one night several years ago. I woke up the next morning and added the following post to the top of the forum, where it still lives:

*I was sick over the weekend, and in my feverish state several insights appeared. In fact, I awoke from a dream where I was with several of you in a pool and you were all saying, "Help me!" I woke up uncontrollably shivering, the veil between thought and the unconscious thinned, and I could see with pure clarity what the difference is between those who transform their anxiety and those who remain stuck:*

*It's the degree to which you pull the projection off of your partner and detach from the thought that your anxiety is because you're with the wrong person.*

*Those who detach from this thought and take 100% responsibility for their anxiety inevitably do the deeper work of excavating what lies underneath the anxiety.*

*Those who are addicted to the thought that they need to leave in order to find serenity will remain stuck.*

*It's as simple as that.*

*And, yes, I understand it's not simple at all. There are good reasons why people remain addicted to the projection, and that's where the work needs to begin. But you will not transform unless, every time you think, "I'm with the wrong partner. I don't really love him/her. I need to leave," you counter those thoughts with, "I'm scared. This isn't about my partner. What am I really scared of? What feelings are these thoughts covering up? What needs attention inside?"*

*Every single one of you who is on this forum is in a good, loving, healthy relationship. You've all raked your relationship over the coals and found no good reason to leave, no red-flags, nothing alarming. You've all had stretches of time when you've felt happy and content - even if it's only an hour or two. Therefore, the problem clearly lies inside of you. It existed in you before you ever met your partner and being with him/her was merely the trigger that released these old, deep-seated issues: fears, grief, insecurities, false beliefs about yourself and love.*

*When you look at posts by members like BrooklynBride, ExpatBride, AussieBride, and Cbear (Cyndle in The Stories at the end of this course), you'll see very little mention of their partners. Their eyes are on their own plates. They've absorbed the responsibility for their difficult feelings 100%. That doesn't mean that they don't fall into projection now and again, but it's short-lived and they're able to see, fairly quickly, that a projection has taken hold.*

*This was also what allowed me to transform my relationship anxiety/terror into clarity and serenity: I knew, without a doubt, that the fears originated inside of me and had lived there for a long time, long before I met my husband. I knew that I had a faulty definition of love and that what I had called love was actually longing. I knew that I had met someone with whom I had such a strong, loving connection that I wasn't willing to let him go and wasn't willing to allow my fears to call the shots. I worked my tail off, and didn't submit to the belief that the problem was him (even though my fear-based self did a hell of a job trying to convince me that he wasn't good looking enough, he was too annoying, irritating, silly, etc).*

*Scottishbride said it well in a post several months ago:*

*Probably the main reason that I was able to pull back the anxiety is that I knew that I had felt the same feelings of disconnect and "I don't want this" with my ex. No matter what my anxiety was telling me, it couldn't attack the definite fact that I had felt that way before and that it had come on when my ex had stated his intention to fully commit to the relationship. I think a lot of my future work will be based around this. I spent the whole relationship with my ex having one foot out the door. That was my safety net. Whenever that safety net was threatened it would bring up an extreme reaction in me. At the time I put it down to the fact that*

*there were red flags but now I realize that was just an easy excuse at the time. I didn't do any work at the end of my last relationship. Seriously, I felt no pain, no regret, no sorrow. I was overwhelmed with glee at the prospect of getting OUT! It did strike me as a little weird at the time. Almost like there was a bubble between me and my feelings. But I wasn't at all willing to consider shifting or bursting that bubble.*

*And then of course, I met R within 2 weeks of moving out. In short, I ran away from it all. That worked for 2.5 years and boy was I happy (when ignorance is bliss, tis folly to be wise). And then R proposed and it all went to pieces. That has been a hugely valuable lesson for me. You can run from these issues but you cannot hide. They will come. Sorry girls and boys but you can't avoid them forever so next time you want to project on to your partner, just remember that is not serving you, and you are only delaying the inevitable and making it harder for yourself. Denial was my best friend for a long time. I miss her a lot. But I realize now she wasn't really a friend and even though it would be easier, I know it's time for me to move on from her.*

*So yeah, while I couldn't properly articulate my feelings due to the fog of anxiety, the mere fact that this little nugget of information did not fit in to my "it has to be R" jigsaw was enough to give me my first step up out of the hole.*

If you want to shift from anxiety to serenity you MUST recognize that the uncomfortable feelings/thoughts/anxiety have nothing to do with your partner. Again, the discomfort lived inside of you before you knew him/her - and likely before you were even born if you've absorbed your parents' unresolved pain and anxiety - and it will remain inside of you until you dive into it with curiosity and the willingness to take full responsibility for its roots and resolution. Do you want to

keep living with this, keep blaming others and external experiences, keep passing it on to future generation or are you ready to heal?

## Working with Projection

Most people in an intimate relationship will, at some point, find themselves stuck in a projection about their partner. Projections are a bit challenging to define and even more challenging to see when you're in one. In Wikipedia's words:

“Psychological projection or projection bias (including Freudian Projection) is the unconscious act of denial of a person's own attributes, thoughts, and emotions, which are then ascribed to the outside world, such as to the weather, the government, a tool, or to other people...

Projection is considered one of the most profound and subtle of human psychological processes, and extremely difficult to work with because, by its nature, it is hidden. It is the fundamental mechanism by which we keep ourselves uninformed about ourselves.”

I know a client is in a projection when she or he begins our initial phone session with the some version of the following sentiments: “I'm with such a wonderful partner. He's loving, kind, responsible, honest. But all I see are his negative qualities. I don't want to be around him like I used to and I can't feel my love for him. Help!” Once we confirm the absence of red-flags (addiction, abuse, irreconcilable differences regarding core values, unresolved trust issues - see lesson 7 of this section), we move into what the projection could be protecting my client from feeling. In other words, it's likely that they're projecting their fear, grief, loss, uncertainty, and false beliefs about their own unworthiness onto their partner.

There are two components to working with projection. First, we must begin to dig beneath the presenting problem – “I can't feel my love for my partner and

everything about him bugs me” - to discover the core feelings underneath. Are you scared of growing up and become a self-responsible adult (and this has nothing to do with chronological age)? Are you grieving another layer of loss around your father’s death years ago? Are you over-focusing on your partner’s physical attractiveness or intellectual prowess, for example, as a way to avoid owning your own sense of unworthiness in those areas and/or your own distorted belief that your worthiness, and therefore others’ worthiness, is a function of externals (looks, intellect, degrees, paychecks)?

There are hundreds of possible scenarios leading to hundreds of associated feelings and needs that need to be addressed directly. Once the real feeling and/or need is exposed and effectively attended to, the projection onto one’s partner will begin to diminish. This entire course is an in-depth process for dealing with projection. When you commit to working with the process daily, you usually see results quickly. That is, until the next projection takes hold and you need to attend at yet a new level!

The second component for working with projection is how to handle it in the moment. It can be quite disconcerting and disheartening to be sitting across the dinner table from your partner and feel a million miles away. Or to be sitting beside her on the couch when she reaches for you and you want to run. I offer the following script to you for working with the projection in the moment, to be said to yourself and repeated as many times as necessary:

“I’m in a projection.” By naming the projection you will immediately diffuse some of its power. You may not even believe that you’re in a projection, but calling the fear by its true name works even if you don’t believe it.

“I’m seeing my partner through distorted eyes. It’s not reality.” Projections feel real, that’s why they’re so hard to work with. By using your rational mind and

telling yourself it's not real, even when it feels so real, you will be able to come back into the moment more easily.

After you've told yourself the truth, it's time to transform the negative energy into positive. One way to do this in the moment is to focus on one thing about your partner that you love. It could be something small and physical, like his hands or her eyes. It could be a character trait like his kindness or her sense of humor. Whatever you choose make sure it's something you truly love and can focus on entirely. Be careful not to allow your fear-based thoughts to enter into this exercise – but if they do, acknowledge them and consciously put them aside. Spend at least one minute focusing exclusively on this particular positive trait that you love about your partner.

I also encourage you to MOVE TOWARD your partner physically in some way. There's nothing like taking positive action that sends fear the message that YOU – not your fear – are in charge. Cuddle in closer. Plant a real kiss. Initiate sex. I know it's the last thing you want to do when you're in a projection, but it's often the most effective way to cut through the fear-layers and send your fear-self the message, "I hear you but I'm not listening to you. I'm not giving you power over my life and my choices any longer." And when you initiate physical contact, you also release the hormone oxytocin into your bloodstream, also known as "the love hormone." Studies show that physical contact stimulates oxytocin, which then makes you feel more loving feelings. And we know that love is more powerful than fear, so by inviting in loving feelings you are shrinking the fear.

If you're at home or a place where you can take the work deeper, you can choose to explore what the projection might be distracting you from feeling or what it may be pointing to inside of you that needs attention. You can do this either with or without your partner. If at all possible, I encourage you to do this

with your partner as it carries the potential of increasing intimacy between you. But if you don't feel safe enough to do so or if your partner is also a highly sensitive person and will take offense if you share your process, you can ask for some private time and start journaling with your emotional self and your inner wisdom (loving inner parent) to begin to uncover the important feelings and beliefs that are trying to surface so that you can bring the truth to them. (See lesson on journaling/dialoguing in Section 2, Lesson 4.)

If you find yourself stuck in a projection, you can take heart in knowing that you're not alone! With practice and patience, you will forge your way through and begin to feel your true feelings of love for your partner once again. Remember: None of this is fast work. There is no magic pill for working with the fear-based mind and uncovering the distorted beliefs that govern many of our actions. Sadly, most people have never heard of the term "projection" until finding my work (it really should be taught in high school) so be patient with yourself as you absorb this new concept and learn to apply it to your life.

Also remember that projections will crop up throughout your relationship and is not a sign that you haven't done the work or evidence that you are, in fact, with the wrong person (as your anxious mind would like to have you believe).

Projections are simply and brilliantly our inner Self's way of alerting us to the fact that there is more inner work to be done. Sometimes it's easier to see our raw spots on the mirror of our partner's face than see it in our own selves. When we understand this, we can immediately pull back to the projection and ask what is needed.

## Projection as Addiction

One of the most common projections for someone struggling with relationship anxiety is the thought, “I don’t love him/her.” What’s critical to understand is that when this thought intrudes on your mind (more on intrusive thoughts in Section 3), *you’re in a projection*, and that a projection, as we’ve now learned, is a defense or an addiction against feelings the anxiety, self-doubt, and old traumas around love that everyone carries, as well as old, unshed grief that needs attention. As one of the women on the e-course forum said so poignantly in a recent post: “But I also know from my own experience that it’s so much easier to stay in the projection state than to deal with the real grief.”

It might sound strange to think of projection as an addiction, but in order for this to make sense you need to understand the difference between a *process* addiction as opposed to a *substance* addiction. An addiction is anything that distracts or protects you from your painful feelings and/or unmet inner needs. We commonly think of addictions as related to substances like drugs, alcohol, or sugar. But process addictions, like spending, sex, television, planning, lying and ruminating are just as rampant and difficult to address. Planning? Ruminating? Were you surprised to read these in the list of addictions? Planning is when you can’t stop thinking about things you have to do. Ruminating is when you become so obsessed about a single thought that it successfully distracts or protects you from addressing the underlying emotional pain.

When people find their way to my work, they’re often over-focusing on their partner, funneling their fear, grief and old wounds around love and intimacy onto the person closest to them. They put their partner under a microscope until all they see are the so-called faults and flaws. They disregard the good times,

diminish what works, and only focus on the reasons why they can't possibly open their heart to this person. Then they spin their thoughts into a spool of negativity until a single thought remains: I don't really love him/her. And that's when they find their way to my work. Some version of this is why you're here, taking this course.

What's essential to remember is that you're struggling NOT because you don't love your partner but because you love him/her more than you've ever loved anybody in your life (I can hear your fear-based self piping up right about now with something like, "No, I don't. I never really loved my partner" Just note that and keep reading ;)). And this scares the you-know-what out of your fear-based self and your tender heart, who simply doesn't trust love because of what it's seen, heard, and experienced. In fact, I've also come to understand that the depth of the old pain (emotional, physical, bullying, sexual, heartbreak from first love) informs the intensity of the projection *once you're in a real relationship with a safe person*. The fear-based self is simply freaking out because *it doesn't trust that love can be safe*. It's screaming at you in every way it can to *get out now*. And it often uses the line that will get you the most which, for many people, is, "I just don't love him/her."

Projection is one of the most difficult psychological states to deal with because it feels so real. The hardest part is peeling the projection off of your partner and getting, really getting, that it's not about the other person. Your inner protector-self will think of every reason in the book why your case is different — ("Sheryl doesn't really know what she's talking about." or "But what if it IS about the other person?!" ) — but having worked with thousands of women and men over the years *just like you*, I can say with a fair amount of certainty that chances are quite high that you're in a good relationship and that it truly isn't about the other person.

Hang in there. Hold on. You will get through this. It takes a real commitment to yourself, patience, and support, but if thousands of others have gotten through it and found their way to love, you can, too.

## *The Negative Voice*

Like any process of self-growth and healing, working with the habitual patterns that keep us mired in negative stuck places is a practice. When my clients ask me what to do about the negative lens through which they're viewing their partner, I tell them that they need to be working with it every day. The conversation begins something like this:

"I look at my partner and all I see are the negative things about him/her. Most of these things I never even noticed before or they didn't bother me enough to spend much time thinking about them. But now it's all I think about. We'll be out with friends and my partner will laugh and I'll spend the next several hours annoyed by his/her laugh. Or he won't be social enough or make enough money. Does this mean I shouldn't be with him/her? If I was really in love with him/her I probably wouldn't be feeling this way, right?"

I'll answer the last question first: No. The fact that your partner annoys you does not mean that you shouldn't be with him. It means that you're a human being in a real relationship! Once you're past the infatuation stage of a relationship (if there ever was one), reality sets in and you have to deal with the fact that your partner is not a deity. He's not a perfect God. She's not a flawless Goddess. He's a real person with real flaws. She's fallible, just like you are. Instead of accepting this unfortunate fact, the mind focuses on one attribute – like his laugh or a certain mannerism or her level of social fluidity – as a way to try to avoid dealing with the bottom-line truth of your partner's humanity.

Sometimes the focus on attributes is also a way to avoid dealing with deeper issues within you. Instead of attending to the core feelings of life, your mind is protecting you by over-focusing on your partner. Your partner is, of course, the

most obvious distraction from the uncomfortable feelings since he's the reason why all of this is happening — at least right now. But the feelings really have nothing to do with him or her. And the more you focus on him/her, the longer the grief or fear will hang around and interfere with your ability to experience joy during your relationship.

Now to address the initial question about focusing on the negative qualities. When we're stuck in a negative cycle, we're stuck in a very unloving place. This is harmful to your partner, to you, and to the third body of the relationship. As negative thinking is a form of addiction, it's essential to address its root causes. In other words, what is the negative thinking protecting you from feeling? This is the deeper work that needs to take place on a daily basis – the practice of working with yourself and understanding the multiple prongs that comprise filling your Well of Self. So you work from the ground up to shift the negativity. You will hear and read this from me many times throughout this course, and it will make more sense as you dive into the work of Section 2. For now start to name your projection for what it is, and recognize that when it's in the driver's seat you're stuck in a negative cycle.

But you can also work in the other direction and focus on shifting the behavior itself, as I talked about above. Sometimes a shift in your behavior will facilitate the process of understanding the root causes as you'll be lifted from your negative stuck place long enough to be offered more insight. Shifting the behavior means that every time you find yourself focusing on a negative attribute about your partner, you consciously and intentionally replace it with a positive focus. So you think, "Ugh, I can't stand that my partner is shorter than I am," then catch the negative – and fruitless – thought and instead ponder, "What do I really love about my partner?" and spend time soaking into the state of loving. This should be done both in the moment and separate from the moment.

When I meet a client who's stuck in a negative over-focus on their partner I always recommend writing a daily appreciation list. Again, this is part of the daily practice of attending to an unhealthy emotional habit. Number a sheet of paper from one to ten and let your mind focus on what you love about your partner (there are sheets in the exercise section below, or just use your journal). You might not feel emotionally connected to the words, but sometimes the action itself will open up the clogged pathways that are preventing you from dwelling in the positive state of appreciation. If the exercise elicits grief or sadness, welcome those feelings as well. Since the addiction to negative thinking is masking important feelings, when the addiction is dismantled, the feelings might start to surface.

Herein lies the crux of Conscious Transitions philosophy and a central piece of any process of self-help and healing: welcome the feelings. The feelings are good, the feelings are the gold, the feelings, when embraced with love and acceptance, are what will move you through the anxiety and confusion of your relationship anxiety and guide you toward clarity, and, ultimately, love.

## When It Really Feels Like Something Isn't Right

The following is a post from a very wise young man named Justin, who was a member of my Trust Yourself 30-day program, and who courageously shares his story in the last section of this course. Here he's responding to another course member who was sharing that her relationship really didn't feel right much of the time:

*I know how you feel because sometimes when I get quiet and practice stillness, I sense a feeling that something isn't right. I'm reminded of other times in my life when I've had to commit to important things and felt unsettled or ambivalent—such as my job, my degrees, close friendships. The intensity of ambivalent feelings hasn't always felt the same, but the attitude of ambivalence has always been there. It's especially prevalent in my relationship. Not only do I feel ambivalent, but sometimes — because of the negative commentary in my mind that I attach to — I can easily feel numb, uninterested, unattracted/disconnected, and even repulsed. Though, I think that these sensations stem from a complexity of culturalization that has instilled certain beliefs deep within.*

*In my opinion, I — alongside many other people — have been socialized and conditioned to strive for perfection. This socialization relates to a problem in our society — which is that our society is made up of “maximizers.” It's based on the concept that we can have it all and won't be satisfied with life until we do have it all, (obviously not realistic). This creates a conditioned effect: perfection leads to happiness and imperfection leads to unhappiness.*

*What I've come to realize is that I may not be with someone who is my perceived ideal match (in my case this is physically and personality-wise) so my instinct is that this doesn't feel right. But some questions worth reflecting on are: Why do I*

*expect to be with my "almost perfect match?" Why is it important to be with my almost perfect match? Is this even attainable or is it an endless cycle of searching? If your ego-self is anything like mine, it might say something like: "You're not looking for perfection; this relationship just isn't right." Though, I would challenge this statement and question if that's true because on a deeper level, you may in fact be striving for perfection to some degree. A cessation to the searching could be linked to the thankfulness for what you do have — as opposed to the rumination on what you don't have.*

*Personally, I feel like I can learn a lot about myself and life in general from my current relationship given the circumstances, such as: how to soften judgment, how to practice gratitude, how to be more mindful of my thoughts and feelings, and how to exercise the skill of tolerance, (a trait undervalued and under-exercised in our culture). I feel like if I did attain my almost perfect match, (which, like I mentioned, is perceived), I wouldn't have the same opportunity to learn and grow. Therefore — like most adversity in life — this imperfect relationship may be a blessing in disguise. Is it frustrating and tiring at times? Yes. But it can also be highly rewarding and especially when you notice special moments of openheartedness and experience a deeper connection with your faculty of self-wisdom.*

*Just my thoughts.*

And my response:

*All I can say is a resounding YES to every word you wrote. We expect perfection. We focus on what's missing. We expect relationships to be easy and effortless and fail to realize that they are opportunities to learn and grow, to soften our hard*

*edges, to learn about our own intolerance, (yes, a much undervalued trait in this culture), to learn about our fear walls in all of their manifestations, (including judgement and intolerance), to recognize how powerful projection can be, and to hone ourselves to become more loving, compassionate, and softer human beings. What a gift they are. More than any monastery, convent or retreat, our relationships are spiritual training in action, and if we're blessed enough to find ourselves with a partner who is willing to go through this journey with us, we are blessed, indeed.*

## *Further Exercises for Peeling Back Projection*

In addition to the basic and simple exercises for working with projection that I elucidated in the articles section of this packet, the following exercises will help you dig deeper inside so that you can continually work with projection in a responsible way and, ultimately, break free of its hold.

## *Break Up With Your Fantasy Partner*

We all carry an image who we thought we would partner with. You may not be aware of this image, but I assure you that it's living in your subconscious and is partially responsible for preventing you from embracing the partner you've chosen. When I suggest to my clients that they write down in detail their fantasy partner so they can bring it to consciousness (there can be no healing with bringing our shadow to light), they usually react by saying, "I would feel guilty, like I'm somehow betraying my partner." You can choose to indulge in the guilt, thereby perpetuating the fantasy that is lurking inside of you, or you can recognize that being honest about what's swirling in your inner world is one of the most loving actions you can do for yourself and your relationship.

It's time now to break up with your fantasy partner. On a piece of paper, describe this fantasy partner in as much detail as possible, including physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and sexual characteristics (and anything else that comes to mind). One of the most common sentences I hear in my work is, "I love my partner but he or she isn't who I thought I would end up with." So who *is* who you thought you would end up with? Give yourself permission to lay it out on paper here. Don't edit. Don't censor. Nobody ever has to see this. This is your chance to lay it all out.

Once you've written it down, the next step is to ritualize it. A conscious ritual moves the image or fantasy from the realm of the subconscious, brings it to consciousness, and then sends it away so that you can allow reality to take hold. Rituals utilize one of the four elements — air, water, earth or fire — to take what is no longer needed and transform it into another form. So if you write down your fantasy partner on paper, you might choose to burn it, shred and bury it, or

dissolve the piece of paper in water. Let it go. Let nature or some other elemental force help you release what is no longer serving you.

This is an exercise that I encourage you to do repeatedly, as often as the fantasy partner arises into consciousness. I've also included it again in a later section of the course because it's such a core spoke to the relationship anxiety wheel.

## *A Document of Clarity*

Have you ever had a moment when your partner walks up to you unexpectedly or you see him/her across the room and you think, "Oh, s/he's so cute!" or "Wow, I really love you"? You may attribute that moment to a certain baseball cap or a new dress, but I think it's something deeper. I think it's when your essence meets your partner's essence, when you see each other's hearts without any barriers in the way. It often happens on a wedding day when you're both lifted into your highest selves, transcending the fear walls and protections, and it can also happen in daily life.

What are you seeing in those moments? You're seeing clarity. You're seeing your partner's soul shining through his eyes. You're seeing her heart beaming through her smile. You're seeing, in a word, love.

We can choose to see love. Yes! We can choose to see love. The more you work through your fear-walls, the more love will shine through. We're not culturally conditioned to see love as a practice, but it most certainly is. Sometimes it happens effortlessly, yes, and sometimes we work to remove the films and veils that prevent us from seeing clearly. Either way, the more we can document the moments of clarity, the more we'll be able to trust that we do, indeed, have a baseline of truth that lives buried beneath the layers and layers of fear.

It's during these openhearted moments when you're connected to your own essence and your partner's essence that you *know* that you're in the right place with the "right" person. (By right I mean that you know you're making a loving choice to commit to this person.) It's a deep place of knowing that transcends the chatter of the anxious mind and the barriers of fear. One of my ecourse

participants, after months of diligent work, (which included plenty of negative projections onto her husband), eventually arrived at this clear, openhearted space. She titled her post: I WANT THIS SAID LOUD AND CLEAR! and shared:

*I love his innocence. I love how when he was talking to me about his mom, I could see his essence shining through. I love his big heart and his sweet soul. I've always said he's a sensitive, sweet, caring guy who is super guarded. I recognize it. I love that he's considerate. He said to me today, "Honey? Do you mind if I have a guys night next week?" I said, "Of course not! You can always have a guys night — it's good for you." He said back, "I know, I just wanted to be considerate." Really? How sweet.*

*I love his commitment to me. I love that he got excited that we're doing a Bible study on marriage. I love that he said he was excited about it. I love to see him feel good for taking care of himself by working out.*

*But most of all, I love his soul. His sweet, gentle soul. Plus, he's so cute and blushes when I tell him he's sexy.*

*Holy crap, I'm crying! I just love him. He's so appreciative when I cook him dinner. He's kept our quality time a priority for three years. I love how he walks up to me and just holds me and whispers, "I love you and I love being married to you," then kisses me. I love that cares about my happiness and supports my personal growth.*

*My husband is so wonderful! God, I've missed feeling gratitude towards him. I'm so grateful for this very moment.*

Again, this woman has worked her tail off to be able to distinguish essence from ego-fear self. And she's *still* working at it! This might be spiky or reassuring, but the skill of learning to see essence is work that occurs over several years. One could even say that, like mindfulness, it's the work of a lifetime.

Exercise: Write Your Document of Clarity

Describe your partner's essence. Who is he in his most openhearted self? How would you describe her heart, her essential nature, who she is when all of the non-essentials are stripped away? Also, start to notice when you notice his/her essence. When does he seem most connected to himself, and when are you most available to see his true self?

This document will serve as your baseline of truth: how you perceive your partner and your relationship when your mind and heart are clear of fear. Please add to it every time you have a clear-seeing moment. It is something that can evolve over time, and will serve as a beautiful reminder of how you perceive when an open heart — instead of fear-mind — is running the show.

## *Express Appreciation*

One of the most effective ways to stay connected to your partner and ground yourself when you are feeling overwhelmed is to connect to the gratitude you feel toward him or her. When two people fall in love, they often feel like they are returned to a state of innocence and purity where they see themselves, each other, and the world as if for the first time. They feel thankful for each moment on earth. They notice nuances and subtleties in their familiar surroundings that had previously escaped their attention. It is as if their eyes have been cleansed of the film of falsity by the clear waters of truth and wonder. And if you never had an open-hearted stage in your relationship, don't worry. You've likely had moments when gratitude came more easily and fear was in the backseat.

As time moves on, this open feeling of gratitude often wanes, and when anxiety rears its head it can easily be replaced by resentment and distance. But it only takes a moment to reposition your spiritual compass and align your north pointer with gratitude. Focusing our intention on noticing and expressing gratitude opens a direct pathway to the soul, like a rush of water that washes away the tentacles of fear and leaves an open heart in its wake.

An effective and simple way to express your gratitude toward your partner and knock anxiety out of the driver's seat is to make an appreciation list and give it to your partner once a day, every few days, or once a week. We all need to know that we are loved and appreciated, and there is no greater heart-opener than one person saying to her partner, "This is why I love you..." These can range from the simple to the extraordinary – from "I love the way you stroke my hair" to "I love the commitment you show to our relationship." What matters is that you find the

few minutes to search your heart, find the truth, and offer these gifts to your partner.

Use the following as a template for your lists.

This is what I appreciate about you:

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## Choose Gratitude

I'm including choosing gratitude in the exercises section because gratitude is, in fact, a practice, and it's one of the most powerful ways to break through the illusion of projection. Sometimes gratitude comes unbidden in moments of grace, but more often than not we need to choose to focus on gratitude for the feeling of gratitude to sprout and then blossom. I encourage you to include a gratitude list in your daily practices. Clients and course members who commit to this practice notice a palpable difference in the intensity and frequency of their projections and their levels of anxiety. This is not just gratitude and appreciation about your partner; it's gratitude for the experience of being a human being with all of its gifts and challenges.

When we remember to choose gratitude, the soul will be uplifted.

With each inhale, we give thanks for the gift of being of alive.

With each exhale, we give thanks for the miracle of creation.

With each gift, each moment of grace and surrender, we give thanks for the presence of wellness in our lives.

With each hardship overcome, each lesson learned from each challenge, each adversity met through joining together with others, we give thanks for the opportunity to evolve our soul and contribute to the ever-deepening fabric of universal love.

With each sunrise, we give thanks for a new day.

With each sunset, we give thanks for beauty.

With each embrace, we give thanks for love.

There are so many things for which we can feel grateful.

Remembering gratitude each moment keeps our hearts open to loving, being loved, and the mysteries and miracles of life on this earth.

More on gratitude:

<http://conscious-transitions.com/the-power-of-gratitude/>

<http://conscious-transitions.com/gratitude-108-offering/>

What helps you connect to gratitude? Being in nature? A big cry? Connecting to friends? Beginning or ending your day with a gratitude list is a powerful and effective way to reverse the habit of focusing on what's NOT working and instead reorient and build new neural pathways so that you can learn to focus automatically on what IS working. And the more you focus on what is working, the more you will be able to pull back the illusory veils of projection and see your partner for who he or she really is.