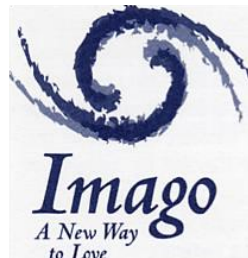


PREPARATION for COUPLE'S THERAPY

An Introduction To IMAGO Relationship Therapy

This pamphlet offers an introduction to couples considering therapy. I wrote it to give some explanation and perspective about what I saw as the causes of the conflict in relationships, and my alternative ideas and approaches to resolving them. I hope the information contained here and your visit to a Certified Imago Therapist will help you in your journey toward a safe and passionate relationship.

--Harville Hendrix, Ph.D.



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Introduction

When couples show up in my office for counseling, they are often in a stew of anger and shock, despair and sadness. Some are relative newlyweds, and they can't understand how they have plummeted from the heights of love and glory into a swamp of hopelessness and conflict.

Others have been married for many years, and though they have been slogging along--in calm or in storm--and their days of wine and roses are a dim memory, they are no less devastated by the shambles of their marriage, and the consequent lack of fulfillment in their lives. Even if life at home is relatively peaceful, couples lament that they have "nothing in common anymore." And so they lead a disappointed or angry co-existence, each with their own friends and interests, in a marriage of convenience, or an arrangement they endure "for the sake of the children."

They wonder if they will ever again feel love for their mates. Can they ever breach the chasm of silence, or anger, that has grown between them? Perhaps they should just cut their losses and find someone who loves and understands them, someone who offers more chance at the love and security they long for.

Whatever form they take, shattered dreams are painful. In seeking counseling, it is likely that you are also struggling to find love and meaning in your marriage. I assure you, as I assure the couples who come to me in such distress, that **there is hope**. In fact, the pain and conflict of marriage arise not out of love for our partners, but from a misunderstanding of what marriage is about. Moreover, your conflict can be the fuel for the fulfillment you seek.

What's Really Going On in Relationships?

As a preface to the counsel you are considering, I want to talk a little about what happens when we fall in--and out of--love. To make sense of what's really going on when couples fight, to gain insight into the hidden agenda of marriage, we need to look at the complex process of human growth and development, and at how we human beings fit into larger schemes of things.

We are creatures of nature, with the evolutionary program of our species encoded in our genes. We all begin life in a state of relaxed and joyful bliss, with a feeling of connectedness to everything and everyone. Our overwhelming impulse at birth is to sustain this feeling of connectedness, **remain attached**. If our caretakers are attuned to our wants and needs, ready and able to provide warmth and safety and sustenance, our feelings of aliveness and well being are sustained. We remain whole.

But of course that's not the way it works out. Even in the best of circumstances, our parents are not able to maintain the perfect standards of our stint in the womb, when everything was provided immediately and automatically in an atmosphere of total safety and continuity. Even the best parents are not available every minute, do not always understand exactly what is needed or unable to meet every demand. More to the point, most of our parents, hampered by their own nurturing deficits, beset by longstanding problems of their own, are unwilling or

unable to meet our infant needs. Tired, angry, depressed, busy, ill, distracted, afraid--our parents fail to sustain our feeling of security and comfort.

But every unmet need causes fear and pain, and in our infantile ignorance, we have no idea how to stop the pain and restore our feeling of safety. Desperate to survive, we adopt primitive coping mechanisms. Depending on our temperament, and the nature of our caretakers' neglect, our feeble defense may take the form of constant crying to get attention. Alternatively, we may withdraw from the touch and attentions of our neglectful caretakers, denying that we even have needs. Though we do what we can, already the world feels unsafe, and love is rationed.

The Escalation of Loss and Dysfunction

Our impulse to remain attached is only the first in a programmed series of impulses that emerge as we grow. After the Attachment stage, the need to explore emerges, and our mission changes accordingly: we need the freedom to move away from our caretakers, and the reassurance that we can reliably return to them. Again, our ability to master this task of

Exploration depends on how well our caretakers understand and support this new Attachment. And so it goes, as the impulse to explore gives way to the impulse to establish a sense of Identity, then Competence, and on through Concern and Intimacy. Each stage builds on the last, forming the foundation on which new skills are built. Any impairment along the way compromises our ability to competently negotiate the next stage.

Meanwhile, throughout our childhood, we are also being socialized, molded by our caretakers and communities to fit into society. We are told what to do, what to say, how to behave; we see behavior modeled by friends, teachers, TV characters; we are intimate witnesses to the relationship modeled by our parents. Observant and malleable, we learn what to do to gain love and acceptance. Socialization, too, chips away at our sense of wholeness and safety, for inevitably we come to see that certain aspects of ourselves aren't working--the way we look or talk, the things that interest us, our abilities, our attractiveness as boys or girls. In the interest, again, of survival, we repress or disown parts of us that society finds unacceptable or unlovable.

Our sense of "allrightness" diminishes further; we end up as shadows of our whole, true selves. If you want evidence of this self-dismantling process, think about the young children you know. At two or three most are still exuberant, lively, unique and eccentric selves, though some already show the signs of apathy or anger or fear that a deprived infancy has left in its wake. At eight or ten, the inhibitions are more obvious and numerous; it's the rare ten-year-old who is still unmistakably, unabashedly himself. By the mid-teens the toll of incomplete nurturing and society's messages have pretty much come home to roost, as we see in the rebellion, depression, or lack of self-esteem of inadequately loved teenagers.

To the degree that our caretakers and our society are able to support the emergence and solidification of our innate impulses and to the degree that we are allowed to be ourselves, we survive and prosper. Most of us had "good enough" caretakers; we do all right. Others of us didn't fare so well, and our lives are handicapped by our deep hurts. But all of us, to one degree or another, are nursing wounds sustained in childhood, coping as well as we can with the world, and our relationships, using the feeble set of defenses born in the pain of childhood, with parts of our true nature stuffed into drawers in the unconscious. We look grown up, we have jobs and responsibilities, but we are walking wounded, trying desperately to live life fully, all the while

unconsciously hoping to somehow restore the sense of joyful aliveness we started out with.

Falling in Love

When we fall in love, we believe we've found it. Suddenly, we see life in Technicolor. We nibble each other's ears and tell each other **everything**; our limitations and rigidities melt away. We're sexier, smarter, funnier, more giving. We decide that we can't live without our beloved, for now we feel whole, we feel like **ourselves**. For a while we are able to relax. Finally we feel safe, and breathe a sigh of relieved deliverance. It looks like everything is going to turn out all right, after all.

But inevitably--often when we marry or move in together--as night follows day, things just start to go wrong. In some cases, all hell breaks loose. The veil of illusion falls away, and it seems that our partners are different than we thought they were. It turns out they have qualities that we can't bear. Even qualities we once admired grate on us. Old hurts are reactivated as we realize that our partners cannot or will not love and care for us as they promised. Our dream shatters. Disillusionment turns to anger, fueled by fear that we won't survive without the love and safety that was within our grasp. Since our partner is no longer willingly giving us what we need, we change tactics, trying to maneuver our partners into caring--through anger, crying, withdrawal, shame, intimidation, criticism--whatever works. We will **make** them love us. Now we negotiate--for time, love, chores, and gifts--measuring our success against an economic yardstick of profit and loss. The **power struggle** has begun, and may go on for many years, until we split, or we settle into an uneasy truce, or until we seek help, desperate to feel alive and whole again, to have our dream back.

The Imago Emerges

What is going on here? Well, it looks like you have found an Imago (IH-MAHGO) partner, someone, I'm afraid, **who is uniquely unqualified** (at the moment) to give you the love you want. Well, this is what's **supposed** to happen.

Let me explain. We all think that we have free choice when it comes to selecting our partners. In a way, we do. Ours are not arranged marriages--after all, there are no exchanges of money or cows between our families. But regardless of what it is we **think** we're looking for in a mate, our unconscious has its own agenda when it comes to mate selection.

Our primitive "old brain" has a compelling, non-negotiable drive to restore the feeling of aliveness and wholeness that we came into the world with. To accomplish that, it must repair the damage done in childhood as a result of needs not met, and the way it does that is to find a partner who can give us what our caretakers failed to provide.

You'd think, then, that we could choose someone who had what our caretakers' lack--and of course this is what we unconsciously seek. Would that it were so. But the old brain has a mind of its own, with its own checklist of desired qualities. It is carrying around its own image of the perfect partner, a complex synthesis of qualities formed in reaction to the way our caretakers responded to our needs. Every pleasure or pain, every transaction of childhood, has left its mark on us, and these collective impressions form an unconscious picture we're always trying to match

up as we scan our environment for a suitable mate.

This image of "the person who can make me whole again" I call the **Imago**. Though we consciously seek only the positive traits, the negative traits of our caretakers are more indelibly imprinted in our Imago picture, because those are the traits that caused the wounds we now seek to heal. Our unconscious need is to have our feelings of aliveness and wholeness restored by someone who reminds us of our caretakers. In other words, we look for someone with the same deficits of care and attention that hurt us in the first place.

So when we fall in love, when bells ring and the world seems altogether a better place, our old brain is telling us that we've found someone with whom we can complete our unfinished childhood business. Our imperfect caretakers, "freeze-dried" in the memories of childhood, are "reconstituted" in our partner. Unfortunately, since we don't understand what's going on, we're shocked when the awful truth of our beloved surfaces, and our first impulse is to run screaming in the opposite direction.

But that's not all the bad news. Another powerful component of our Imago is that we also seek the qualities missing in ourselves--both good and bad--that got lost in the shuffle of socialization. If we are shy, we seek someone outgoing; if we're disorganized, we're attracted to someone cool and rational. The anger we repressed because it was punished in our home, and which we unconsciously hate ourselves for feeling, we "annex" in our partner. But eventually, when our own feelings--our repressed exuberance or anger--are stirred, we are uncomfortable, and criticize our partners for being **too** outgoing, **too** coldly rational, **too** temperamental.

Waking Up to Reality

All of this seems to be a recipe for disaster, and for a long time this depressing state of affairs puzzled me. How can we resolve our childhood issues if our partners wound us in the same ways as our caretakers, and we ourselves are struck in childhood patterns that wound our partners? **Consciousness is the key**; it changes everything. When we are unaware of the agenda of love, it is a disaster, for our childhood scenarios inevitably repeat themselves with the same devastating consequences. There is a method to this madness, though. The unconscious recreation of the ambience of childhood has the express purpose of bringing this old impasse to a resolution. When we understand that we have chosen our partners to heal certain wounds, and that the healing of those wounds is the key to the end of longing, we have taken the first step on the journey to real love.

Conflict is Natural

What we need to understand and accept is that **conflict is supposed to happen**. This is as nature intended it: everything in nature is in conflict. The hard truth is that the grounds for marriage is really incompatibility; it is the norm for relationships. Conflict needs to be understood as a given, a sign that the psyche is trying to survive, to get its needs met and become whole. It's only without this knowledge that conflict is destructive.

Ignorant of this process, our culture has made incompatibility the grounds for divorce, which counters nature's intention. Society has institutionalized permission for divorce out of a

response to the childish wish for idealized, conflict-free relationships, which is a distortion of the natural process.

Divorce does not solve the problems of marriage. We may get rid of our partners, but we keep our problems, carting them into the next relationship. Divorce is incompatible with the intentions of nature. **Romantic love is supposed to end.** It is the glue that initially bonds two incompatible people together so that they will do what needs to be done to heal themselves, and in the process, heal the rifts in nature, of which we are an integral part. If we remain fixated on romantic love--in love with love--we remain stuck at the one-year-old stage of Attachment. To restore our wholeness, our relationships need to successfully grow through all the developmental stages that were mishandled during our childhood. The good news is that although many couples become hopelessly locked in the power struggle, it too is supposed to end. The emotional bond that is created by romantic love to keep partners together through the hard times evolves into a powerful **organic** bond through the process of resolving conflict.

The way I have come to see it is that nature is healing itself in our relationships. Each individual is a node of energy woven into the tapestry of being, and the tapestry is frayed and weakened where there is conflict. With our self-awareness, we humans do not have to remain struck in childhood ruts; we are uniquely able to correct what has gone wrong. When we heal our relationships, we heal the rift in nature: putting our relationship to rights is ecologically sound!

Making the Choice for a Conscious Marriage

A Conscious Marriage is not for the faint-hearted, for it requires reclaiming the lost, repressed parts of ourselves which we were told were dangerous to have, and which we unconsciously hate ourselves for having. And it means learning more effective coping mechanisms than the crying or anger or withdrawal that have become so habitual for us. In Imago Relationship Therapy, we change to give our partners what they need, no matter how difficult it is, no matter how much it goes against the grain of our personality and temperament. We **stretch** to become the person our partner needs us to be to heal. This is not easy, but it works.

Regardless of what we may believe, relationships are not born of love, but of need; real love is born in relationships, as a result of understanding what they are about and doing what is necessary to have them. You are already with your dream partner, but at the moment, he or she is in disguise and, like you, in pain. A Conscious Marriage itself is the therapy you need to restore your sense of aliveness. The goal of Imago Relationship Therapy is to extricate you from the power struggle and set you on the path of real love.

What Happens in Imago Relationship Therapy?

How do we set about disentangling ourselves from this mess? By redesigning our relationship to complete the unfinished business of childhood. In other words, our unconscious aim--to become whole, to restore our joyful aliveness--must become our conscious intention. Your goal is to become passionate friends with your partner, to develop what might be called "Reality Love," which is based not on childhood notions of Attachment, but on knowledge, care, respect, and value of the other.

In the safe setting of the therapist's office and in the structured work you and your partner will do together, you will:

- 1) tell each other about the wounds you received as a child;
- 2) tell each other exactly what would make you feel loved;
- 3) use that information to rechannel behavior into effective ways of loving and caring for each other, as well as meeting your partner's personal needs;
- 4) dismantle inappropriate beliefs from childhood;
- 5) replace inappropriate behaviors and defense strategies;
- 6) give your partner what he or she wants.

The Ground Rules

Now that's a tall order. Let's look at some of the tools and processes you will use to fill it. At the onset of your therapy, you will be asked to comply with the following ground rules:

- 1) You will agree to attend a minimum of twelve sessions with your partner, and to actively and openly participate in those sessions to the best of your ability.
- 2) You will agree to complete all between-session assignments.
- 3) You will agree to make no decision to terminate or continue your relationship until the completion of twelve sessions.

To help you meet the above commitments, you will be asked to make a **No-Exit** decision, in which you identify how you spend time and energy which might better be spent in your marriage--golf, PTA meetings, reading, drinking, watching TV, sleeping late, even caring for your children--and agree to gradually cut out those diversions which are being used as an escape or an excuse not to be with your partner--the ingredients of what I call the "invisible divorce."

Creating a Safe Haven

The essential background to all you will be doing is a willingness and openness to change. Some of your early therapy sessions will focus on creating a hospitable climate in which to do this difficult work.

- 1) At the onset, your therapist will ask you to **give up blame and criticism**. A major weapon in the power struggle, criticism is adult crying; it is not an effective way to get the love you want. Just as you seek safety in your relationship, you must cease being an object of enmity and fear for your partner. In the course of therapy, you will learn new ways to say what is frustrating you, and ask for the behavior that you want.
- 2) You and your partner will create a **Relationship Vision**, in which you imagine the marriage you would like to have; this co-created vision will be a daily reminder to you of your goals.
- 3) To remind you of the love you once felt for each other, you will be **Re-romanticizing** your relationship, giving each other special loving behaviors--with no strings attached, and regardless of your current feelings about your partner--on a daily basis. These are **target specific** behaviors, i.e., they are **exactly** what your partner needs to feel loved and appreciated.

4) Dealing with your issues around gender, you and your partner will learn ways to transcend the entrenched roles our culture has defined for us as man or woman, husband or wife, so that we can be wholly ourselves.

5) Through all of this, you will be doing exercises geared to awaken your dampened feelings of aliveness, relearning to laugh and have fun together.

Changing Our Behaviors

Many couple's problems are rooted in misunderstood, manipulated, or avoided communications. To correct this, you will be introduced to the **Couple's Dialogue**, the core skill of Imago Relationship Therapy. Using this effective communication technique, you will restructure the way you talk to each other, so that what you say to each other is mirrored back to you, is validated, and empathized with. You will use the Couple's Dialogue to tell each other all about your childhoods, to state your frustrations clearly, and to articulate exactly what you need from each other in order to heal. Clear communication is a window into the world of your partner; truly being heard is a powerful aphrodisiac. The dialogue must then be turned into **action**; we must give our partners what they need, and not just the easy stuff. Now we come to the heart of the matter: in a Conscious Marriage we agree to **change** in order to give our partner what s/he needs. This is a radical idea. Conventional wisdom says that people don't change, there is no growth; we are resigned to our fate, to remaining stuck in our unhappiness.

Change is the catalyst for healing. In changing to give our partners what they need, we heal our own wounds. Our own behavior was born in response to our particular deprivations; it is our adaptation to loss. In giving our partners what is hardest for us to give, we have to bring our hidden selves out into the light, owning the traits we've repressed (rather than projecting them onto our partners), and enlivening atrophied parts of ourselves. When we change our behavior in response to our mate, we heal our partner **and** ourselves.

Here is an example of how this two-way healing works. Let's say that when your partner was a child, the mother was hospitalized, and was unable to give her child (your partner) much emotional support when she returned home. In this situation of powerlessness, your partner might have developed a fear of being abandoned, attended by a fear of being ignored. These fears would have gone "underground" into the unconscious, only to be expressed outwardly as clutching, dependent, attention-seeking behavior. Unless these behaviors were resolved later in childhood, they would show up in your relationship, and be a source of irritation and frustration for you. As you came to know your partner's history through the Couple's Dialogue, you would understand that these behaviors, though triggered by something you might do, actually have their roots in your partner's childhood. Rather than feel angry or blamed, you would be more sympathetic.

But it would also be safe to assume that you have trouble dealing with this clutching or jealous behavior, and that you are emotionally distant and unsupportive of your partner. We could assume this because, according to Imago theory, your partner has an unconscious desire to change a person who is emotionally abandoning into a person who is emotionally close. One of the reasons your partner selected you is because you possess these required negative traits. Your own emotional distance is probably your way of coping with some childhood pain caused by emotional smothering or criticism, and you naturally defend yourself against a recurrence of the

experience. However, if you could see that your reaction serves no purpose in the present situation, but instead is distancing you from your partner, you would be willing to drop this childhood defense and try a new approach that brings you closer together. Overcoming your fear and resistance to acting in this uncomfortable and unfamiliar way, you would grow to a new level of wholeness through accessing your denied affectionateness and emotionality. In the course of healing your partner's wound, in this case, the need for closeness--would heal your own tendency to withdraw emotionally, and your partnership would transcend its former limitations.

Reclaiming Ourselves

Change rarely comes easy; it requires great courage. Awakening traits long buried, traits both feared and hated, learning new and uncomfortable behaviors, can bring up tremendous anxiety. As long as we hate ourselves for having the repressed traits, we cannot believe that our partners can love us as we truly are. We are trapped in our own lie. But when we stop projecting our disowned traits--our anger or stinginess or sexual inhibition--onto our partners, and take responsibility for them, we see that our partners can accept us as we are.

I call the process by which we alter our entrenched behaviors to give our partners what they need **stretching**, for it requires that we conquer our fears, doing what comes **unnaturally**, moving beyond our accustomed beliefs and behavior to access long-dormant parts of ourselves.

Our resistance reflects our defenses. Often we feel that we're losing ourselves. But we are not ourselves **now**; it is in the crucible of change that we regain ourselves.

Over the course of time, as our partners demonstrate their love for us, as they learn about and accept our hidden selves, and as we stretch to love our partners, our pain and self-absorption diminishes. We restore our empathic feelings for our partners, and our feelings of connection to the other that were lost in the pain of our childhood. Finally we learn to see our partners for themselves, with their own private world of personal meaning, their own ideas and dreams, not merely as extensions of ourselves, nor as we wish they were. We no longer say, "What, you liked that awful movie?" but "Tell me why you liked that movie. I want to know how you think."

Learning to Love

The barrier to love is self-hatred. When it breaks down, in the course of our dialogue with our partner, and in stretching to meet each other's needs, we see that we can be ourselves and still be loved. Finally, we can relax; everything is all right.

A conscious relationship has tremendous potential to correct the distortions of our caretaking and socialization. It is a spiritual path that leads us home again, to joy and aliveness, to the feeling of oneness we started out with. All through the course of **Imago Relationship Therapy** you will be learning to express love as a behavior daily, in large and small ways: in other words, in stretching to give your partner what s/he needs, you learn to love. The transformation of your marriage will not be accomplished easily or quickly; you are setting off on a lifelong journey. But in order to have a different relationship, you must do something different. Imago Relationship Therapy is that something!

Reading Resources:

Hendrix, Harville, *Getting The Love You Want: A Guide For Couples*, HarperPerennial, New York, 1988.

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Hendrix, Harville, and Hunt, Helen, *The Singles Companion: Meditations and Exercises for Keeping The Love You Find*, Pocket Books, New York, 1995.

Luquet, Wade, and Harville Hendrix, *Short-Term Couples Therapy: The Imago Model in Action*, Brunner/Mazel, New York, 1996

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Hendrix, Harville, and Hunt, Helen, *The Parenting Companion: Meditations and Exercises for Gving The Love That Heals*, Pocket Books, New York, 1999.

Hendrix, Hendrix and Hunt, Helen LaKelly, *Couplehood As A Spiritual Path: The Imago Process for Churches*, Imago Productions, Inc., New Jersey, 2004.

IMAGO RELATIONSHIP THERAPY

Harville Hendrix, Ph.D., director and founder of the Imago Relationships International (IRI) in Florida, has developed **IMAGO RELATIONSHIP THERAPY**--not only to teach vital relational skills, but also to shift the entire conceptual understanding of marriage and other committed relationships by empowering partners to become the healers of their own and their partner's wounds from childhood. Dr. Hendrix developed a clinical training program to certify therapists who want to use his techniques with clients and also created workshops to make the basic theory and techniques available to the population at large: **GETTING THE LOVE YOU WANT**--A Workshop for Couples, **KEEPING THE LOVE YOU FIND**--A Workshop for Singles, and **GIVING THE LOVE THAT HEALS**--A Workshop for Parenting (future).

In creating **IMAGO RELATIONSHIP THERAPY**, Dr. Hendrix has integrated a wide range of theories that basically include communication theory, object-relations theory, systems theory, psychoanalysis and Jungian theory, developmental theories, humanistic/person-centered theory, recent developments in inner-child work, research on the triune brain, and spiritual formation.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

- Our original state is one of wholeness, joy, curiosity, spontaneity, connection and welcoming of life.
- We are all frustrated or wounded at various stages in childhood through over/under-parenting and socialization that are the results of our parent's and society's woundedness and/or external situational stresses.
- Development does not occur in a vacuum. It is the product of the dynamic interaction of the system with its environment. (Socialization)
- The selection of a partner is the result of the unconscious desire to complete or correct what was unfinished in childhood. We have a need to complete the "gestalt." We select a partner who carries both the positive and negative characteristics of our caretakers and who was wounded in the same areas, but adapted in a complementary way.
- The adaptation patterns of one partner to the childhood wounds trigger the wounds and adaptations patterns of the other. It becomes pattern relating to pattern, rather than person relating to person.
- Developmentally specific nurturing of the other by each partner repairs the wound from childhood both for the partner and for the self. Each partner is able to reclaim repressed or lost parts of his or her original wholeness that leads to a vibrant, alive, passionate relationship.
- In addition, the part of the brain that experienced the woundedness (and is designed to protect the survival of the person from any perceived threat to its existence) can only be repaired by repeated safety in its *experience*. Only new *experiences* repeated over time can produce lasting change in reactive patterns.

Imago Relationship Therapy recognizes that the inherent nature of human beings is a "wholeness" that includes such qualities as the ability to be spontaneous and creative, to tolerate and even welcome uncertainty in life, to accept themselves and others, to need both solitude and deep intense relationships, to care deeply and genuinely for others and to be inner-directed, having an open and

fresh attitude toward life.

BASIC TOOLS

Imago Relationship Therapy's basic tools, a specific form of couple's dialogue and re-imagining of the partner, empower couples to create this essential healing quality of a therapeutic relationship in their *own* relationship.

The dialogue process gives them a practical tool to let their partner know that they have....

- Heard them (by mirroring back accurately without interpretation or judgment)
- That they have understood (through genuine validation, whether or not you "agree") and as a result can....
- Verbally empathize with their partner both in an affective and a cognitive way.

As couples use the specific structure of the dialogue in various ways, re-imagining of the partner occurs and power struggles are diffused. Couples are able to assist each other in recognizing the wounding of childhood and finding specific ways they can assist their partner and themselves in repairing those wounds. The image of the partner is transformed from "someone who won't give me what I want or need, etc." to a person who was deeply wounded as a little child, and who can recover their inherent self with "my" assistance. The attitude toward the partner shifts from criticism and blame to compassion, hope, and a commitment to assist the partner in the healing of that child/adult. In this way, emotional safety is created and deepened.

While most theories and techniques attempt to use contracts or other negotiating tools which tend to give an acceptable structure for the power struggle to continue in a more covert way, *Imago Relationship Therapy* assists couples in stepping out of the power struggle into a more conscious and intentional relationship. It does not encourage couples to deny or repress conflict, but rather presents practical tools that transform frustrations and conflict into welcomed opportunities for growth. Rather than leave dialogue at a coping or adjustment level, this process uniquely works to heal the wounds of childhood which have been carried into the present and are the source of the power struggles and the pain in the relationship. Of course as this happens, the person is not only able to reclaim their whole self in the relationship, but in other aspects of their lives.

In a revolutionary new way, Dr. Hendrix has shifted the power of the healing relationship traditionally reserved for the therapist/client relationship into the hands of the couple. With guidance and practice, they are empowered to create that healing relationship with each other. It is the intent of *Imago Relationship Therapy* to effectively move couples from on-going dependency on a therapist to empowerment; an advancement welcomed by mental health professionals.

Adapted from Rick Stolp, Ph.D., Clinical Instructor, IRI, Raleigh, North Carolina.