

# INTEGRAL LIFEWORK “RELATIONSHIP MATRIX”

By T.Collins Logan, Integral Lifework Coach

The following chart provides ways to evaluate existing relationships and understand the dynamics of new relationships as they are formed. The premise is simple: there are many different levels of attraction and involvement, and unless there is a transparent, mutual understanding of what specific combinations apply to any given relationship, we are liable to either be disappointed and frustrated with our experiences, or to inadvertently disappoint and frustrate others.

<p><b>Level of Commitment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. <b>Profound</b> (there has never been a question about this being a lifelong and mutually committed relationship)</li> <li>B. <b>Pronounced</b> (one of our closest and most important relationships)</li> <li>C. <b>Moderate</b> (social bonds like work relationships, those between doctors and patients, family members who aren't emotionally close to us, etc.)</li> <li>D. <b>Mild</b> (general commitment to social expectations, such as conforming to laws or traditions)</li> <li>E. <b>Dysfunctional</b> (obsessive, addictive, or compulsive)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Type of Affinity or Attraction:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Spirit</b> (a inexpressible but deep attraction that shares a common understanding of events in the context of spiritual priorities)</li> <li>2. <b>Heart</b> (sharing mutually important values, goals and attitudes – including spiritual ones)</li> <li>3. <b>Mind</b> (intellectual affinity – thinking alike or understanding each other's thought process with surprising ease)</li> <li>4. <b>Physical</b> (enjoying how someone looks or moves, the sound of their voice, their smell, etc.)</li> <li>5. <b>Sexual</b> (sexual attraction)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Level of Intimacy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. <b>Devotional</b> (wide open passionate worship that knows no bounds)</li> <li>II. <b>Soul Friends</b> (deep spiritual trust, openness and honesty)</li> <li>III. <b>Companionship</b> (a comfortable closeness, frankness and mutual trust)</li> <li>IV. <b>Compassionate</b> (an unconditional acceptance and desire to relieve suffering – often initially one-sided)</li> <li>V. <b>Convenience</b> (sharing common, cooperative goals for a limited duration)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Level of Social Acknowledgement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <b>Public</b> (everyone knows)</li> <li>b. <b>Immediate Community</b> (only our closest friends know)</li> <li>c. <b>Private</b> (i.e. “just us” – we only acknowledge it between ourselves)</li> <li>d. <b>Self</b> (we know, but we haven't shared with anyone else – even the other person with whom we feel a connection)</li> <li>e. <b>Unknown</b> (a relationship already exists, but we don't consciously acknowledge it to ourselves)</li> </ul>

Consider the many flavors of emotion and intention represented in the chart, and reflect on past relationships that have failed in some way. Is there a correlation between the type of connection you anticipated and what you actually experienced? Would the relationship have recovered if either of you had been willing to accept what the other offered, without confining it to preconceived notions of what *should* have been? In seeking out new friendships, have you been clear in your communication of the levels of connection you are willing to offer and receive? With this matrix in mind, what dynamics exist in your current relationships, and how might you navigate them differently?

Clearly, these definitions apply to all types of interpersonal relationship, and there are thousands of potential combinations. For instance, one or more levels of Affinity may apply (i.e. we might share both a “Mind” and “Heart” Affinity with the same person). It then becomes that much more complex when one person feels multiple levels of Affinity or Attraction, while the object of their affection reciprocates on a different level. When two people have completely dissimilar understandings of what attracts them, what level of social acknowledgement exists, or what kind of intimacy is expected, the potential for disappointment, frustration and/or conflict is obvious.

## **EXERCISE**

Print out two copies of the *Relationship Matrix* chart, and invite one or more of your closest friends to “rate” each area of your relationship while you do the same on the second copy. Be honest and considerate in your assessment – perhaps spending a day or two contemplating it – then sit down together and compare your ratings. Be prepared for surprises. You may find your friendship affirmed in new ways, or you may find an area of difference that requires more discussion – it is, in fact, very likely that such a difference has caused tension between you in the past.

If relationship expectations between two people are not “in sync,” how do we go about redefining them, especially if such dissonance becomes antagonistic? Admittedly, the historic patterns of certain relationships may be so ingrained that we find it difficult to transform them – it may be especially challenging with marriage partners, family members, friends we have known since we were very young, or with a coworker who really gets under our skin. Yet, if we want to evolve all aspects of our being, we will inherently be changing the nature of our relationships. When we decide to break a negative cycle, we may take time away from old influences. But authentic love is not exclusive, it is inclusive: if we are growing in wisdom and compassion, then we will be able to tolerate and eventually transform any and all unhealthy relationships in our lives into healthy ones. There will always be antagonisms we find particularly daunting, and we may set new boundaries and avoid certain activities or insulate ourselves; but the transformation of our most difficult relationships is the clearest evidence of our own evolution. Like anything else, it is simply a matter of accepting our own limitations and abilities, and recognizing that redefining any relationship begins in our mind and heart, not in changing someone else’s behavior. That is why we will eventually be able to offer ourselves anew, with clearly communicated expectations and without invalidating others. If we do this humbly, without accusation or blame, we open a door of choice for our friends, family and loved ones through which they will venture – in their own good time.