



CONSCIOUS LOVING:

The Journey to Co-Commitment

(from Conscious Loving: The Journey to Co-Commitment by Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks)



WHAT IS CO-COMMITMENT?

A co-committed relationship is one in which two or more people support each other in being whole, complete individuals. The commitment is to going all the way, to letting the relationship be the catalyst for the individuals to express their full potential and creativity. In a co-committed relationship between two people, each takes 100 percent responsibility for his or her life and for the results each creates. There are no victims in co-committed relationships. In fact, victimhood is impossible when both people are willing to acknowledge that they are the cause of what happens to them. There is little conflict, because neither person plays the accusatory, victim role. With the energy saved through lessened conflict, both people are free to express more creativity.

CO-COMMITMENT LEADS TO CO-CREATIVITY

Co-commitment leads to the ultimate reward in close relationships: co-creativity. A co-creative relationship is one in which two people access more of their creativity as a result of their loving interaction. Out of the harmony of a co-committed relationship springs an enhanced energy that enables both partners to make a greater contribution

THREE FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CO-COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS

Until we consciously choose to have co-committed relationships, we are stuck with entanglements. We inherit a tendency toward entanglement: it's mainly what we saw around us growing up. We tend to perpetuate entanglements until the moment we wake up and say: "I choose from now on to have co-commitment." Even after you make this commitment you will likely spend a period of time oscillating between the two, but at least your growth will have a positive direction.

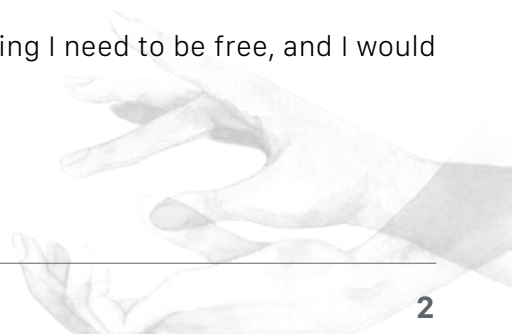
Think of it as waking up from anesthesia; the transition is hard. But what you can do is make a conscious commitment to change in a way that is comfortable and convenient to you and to those around you.

You do this by making a silent agreement with the universe that you are willing to learn however you need to, but you prefer gentle lessons. Then you talk to those around you and ask them if they would be willing to have their lessons gently.

There is no requirement that enlightenment be painful, unless you are trying to avoid pain. Then the universe has no choice but to teach you through pain. One of the universe's strategies is to put directly before you the things you are trying to avoid. It is possible to grow and learn in a way that is loving to yourself and others. All you do is make a commitment that you want it that way.

Many of our clients phrase it this way: "I'm willing to see and handle anything I need to be free, and I would like my lessons in a friendly, loving way for me and others around me."

There are three things you must do to bring your commitments into reality.



▮ *Fundamental Requirement 1: Feel All Your Feelings*

A great deal of energy in close relationships is wasted due to one or more persons trying to keep feelings hidden. Our feelings are central to life—they are made of the raw energy that drives and motivates our existence—and to be cut off from them is to suffer a slow, silent erosion of the spirit....

▮ *Fundamental Requirement 2: Tell the Microscopic Truth*

As you are by now aware, much pain and distortion is created in relationships by not telling the truth....The fine art of telling the truth must be developed in order to have co-committed relationships. In fact, the real skill is in telling what we call the microscopic truth.

The microscopic truth is when you speak the truth about your internal experience as you are currently perceiving it. For example, "When you said you were going away for the weekend I felt a tight band of constriction in my chest and a bunch of thoughts flew through my mind like 'She's abandoning me' and 'What'll I do all by myself?'" In this case the speaker reported the raw data as it streamed through body and mind. This is telling the microscopic truth, and it has tremendous healing value.

Why human beings do not tell the truth has never been studied in close detail, but in our work several main reasons have emerged. First, many people withhold the truth because they do not want other people to feel bad. You don't tell your spouse about your affair because you don't want to hurt him or her. Look out if you use this reason, though, because it is usually accompanied by the following one: You don't tell the truth because you don't want to feel the consequences of your spouse's bad feelings. If you are not telling the truth because you don't want to hurt the other person, you are also likely protecting yourself from the other's sadness, wrath, or revenge.

Sometimes we do not tell the truth because we have seldom witnessed the truth being spoken. Some people just haven't had the opportunity to learn how to access and communicate the truth. Learning to perceive the truth within ourselves and speak it clearly to others is a delicate skill, certainly as complex as multiplication or long division, but very little time is spent on it in school. It is then left to life itself to teach us about telling the truth—and it does, but not always in a gentle manner....

We encourage you to pay particular attention to those issues that seem not worthy of being talked about. The act of telling the microscopic truth about something seemingly trivial liberates the energy to uncover what is really going on at a deeper level.

▮ *Fundamental Requirement 3: Keep Your Agreements*

Keeping agreements is a major factor in co-committed relationships. Broken agreements are a breeding ground for co-dependence; learning to make and keep meaningful agreements is required if you are serious about turning the problem around. In co-dependence, people make unconscious agreements and are faithful to them, but they do not make and keep conscious agreements. An example of unconscious agreement is "I'll let you keep drinking and beating the kids if you promise not to leave me." Co-committed relationships thrive on conscious agreements that are scrupulously kept by both parties. Your aliveness is decreased when you do not keep your agreements. Your mind stores agreements you have made and records whether you have kept them. When you do not keep an agreement you need to acknowledge the failure and talk about it with the relevant other(s). Your other choice is not to look at or deal with it, and this is a costly choice. If you get in the habit of overlooking agreements you gradually lose aliveness, as well as incurring the anger of people around you....

Another major reason why we do not keep agreements is that we get the act of making and keeping agreements tangled up with our anger at authority figures.....Much unhappiness is caused by unresolved authority issues, usually stemming from early childhood, which we then project onto authority figures in our present lives. Co-commitment is made possible when two people deal with their sense of responsibility and integrity. Being alive to the full range of your feelings, speaking the truth at the deepest level of which you are capable, and learning to keep agreements: all of these actions are required to master a co-committed relationship. When these three requirements are met, the real intimacy begins to unfold.

A co-committed relationship may look like magic, but it really is composed of tiny moments of choice. Choosing to tell the truth. Noticing that you are projecting, and finding the courage to take responsibility. Choosing to feel rather than go numb. Choosing to communicate about a broken agreement. Choosing to support your partner as he or she goes through deep feeling. Ultimately, once these are practiced and internalized, the relationship flows effortlessly. Once your nervous system learns to stay at a high level of aliveness and does not need to numb itself by lying, breaking agreements, and hiding feelings, the creativity starts to flow. (pp. 34-40).

COMMITMENT INTENTIONS

A co-committed relationship rests on several intentions that are agreed on by both persons. It takes two to play this game. If one person wants to have co-commitment and the other does not, co-commitment is not possible. If you are the only one who wants to play, you can certainly be healthier and happier by working through these steps on your own, but it is only when both people agree to play that the real intimacy becomes possible. If you are willing to make the following commitments but your partner is not, it is highly likely that you are in a co-dependent relationship. Beware, because it may indicate that you are doing more than your share of the work in keeping the relationship going. If this is the case, you need to examine why you have set up your life this way.

▶ *Commitment 1: I commit myself to full closeness, and to clearing up anything within me that stands in the way.*

With this commitment you take a stand for closeness. Both of you agree that this is what your relationship is about. You also commit yourself to working out all the little things and the big things that people put in the way of being close to each other. We desperately want union with other people, but often we are also deathly afraid of it because of the pain it has brought in times past.

When two people agree that they desire closeness, and particularly when they state that they are willing to clear up their barriers to it, the intimacy begins. This conscious commitment is necessary because, until you make it, you are often in the grip of countercommitments that get in the way. For example, many people have an unconscious commitment to ignoring or hiding their barriers to intimacy rather clearing them up. Others have never really considered why they are in relationships at all. They haven't gone public with their intention of being close to others....

▶ *Commitment 2: I commit myself to my own complete development as an individual.*

In Commitment 1 you take a stand for being close. Here you take a stand for separateness. You cannot have ultimate closeness without being fully able to be separate. In other words, the more fully developed you are as an individual, the more you are able to give and receive love in a relationship. In child development, we first

must be able to be close. That is where the nurturance is. Later we must develop the skills of autonomy. Many of us have never had the opportunity to commit ourselves consciously to our own growth. In addition, many of us saw relationships in our past in which people had to compromise their individual development in order to maintain the relationship. They had to get smaller to squeeze themselves into an ill-fitting box. By taking the stand in Commitment 2, you both are going on record as agreeing that individual development and closeness to the other person is important.

In a co-committed relationship, space is as important as closeness. It must be all right for both people to have space and time for themselves. Only through taking space for ourselves can we integrate the learnings in a close relationship. This does not mean you need to go away for a week at a time to rest up (though sometimes that, too, may be a good idea). Taking space may be as simple as a walk or a daily meditation time. In co-dependence, taking space almost always brings up fear. In co-commitment, taking space usually results in a fresh burst of creative ideas. By taking space and time for themselves, partners in a committed relationship renew their individual connections with the universe. Through coming apart and together again, the dance of the relationship is renewed and kept lively.

A commitment to individual development is crucial, because a co-committed relationship emerges only when both people are willing to be 100 percent themselves as individuals. If either person is being less than 100 percent the ground is ripe for power struggles. Each person will be trying to find places to hide from responsibility in the relationship, the places where the other person is at fault. When you are being less than 100 percent, you will tend to want to diminish the other person to match your level. Once you enter the arena of power struggles, there is only one way out: both people must claim 100 percent ownership of the problem....

▲ *Commitment 3: I commit to revealing myself fully in the relationship, not to concealing myself.*

A major event in our lives occurs when we shift our intentions from concealing to revealing. Most of us learned to hide our true selves in order to survive growing up. It is not surprising that we take this practice into our later relationships. It costs, because a close relationship thrives on transparency. Being fully transparent heals the shadow. If your energy is tied up in concealing who you are and how you are, there is little energy left over to fuel creativity....

▲ *Commitment 4: I commit myself to the full empowerment of people around me.*

In co-dependence you enable other people to be ineffective. In co-commitment you enable them to be powerful. With this commitment you take a stand to allow others to assume their full power. Imagine how much two people can accomplish when their commitment is to each other's full growth! Contrast this with how little can be accomplished when both people are committed to restraining the other....

▲ *Commitment 5: I commit myself to acting from the awareness that I am 100 percent the source of my reality.*

Many of the problems in relationships are caused by both partners fighting to claim the victim position. The moment you fail to claim 100 percent creation of your life, you step into a trap. Unconscious loving

feeds on victimhood, which can exist only when people are not taking responsibility for what is happening to them. When two people are willing to be the source of their reality, real intimacy becomes possible. There is no energy wasted over whose problem it is, who's right and who's wrong, whose fault it is, or other power struggles....

▲ *Commitment 6: I commit myself to having a good time in my close relationships.*

In the process of growing up, many of us embrace a view of relationships that causes pain later on: we think that relationships are about suffering. We believe that if the relationship is not a struggle we must not be doing it right. As a child, how many people did you see around you who were in a state of joy in their relationships? What about right now? We feel strongly that a formal commitment to having a good time is necessary to move into a state of co-commitment. We do not know the entire meaning of life, but we are very sure it is not to have a bad time. Why not take a conscious stand for joy in your close relationships? You make the rules for your relationships, so try having them be about joy. If you find that you prefer suffering, you can always go back.

When we observe troubled relationships, we often see that the people are strongly committed but that the commitments are unhealthy. The commitments are to things such as:

- Power struggles (who's right, whose problem is it, who's having the worst time)
- Taking care of each other
- Cleaning up the other's messes
- Providing three meals a day
- Getting ahead financially.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with getting ahead financially or providing three meals a day, but without joy what's the point? When both people make a conscious commitment to having a good time, it doesn't matter what kind of activities are engaged in....

Goal setting takes on greater importance after you have embraced the six major co-commitments. Part of the process of having successful relationships is harmonizing your personal goals with the goals of those around you. However, many of us have never consciously figured out what our goals are, nor have we found out what people around us want.... When you know what you want, when you find out what others want, and when you harmonize the two, you are greatly propelled toward reaching those goals. (pp. 81-90).

■ *Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, Conscious Loving: The Journey to Co-Commitment*
(New York: Bantam Books, 1990).

