

## **Why You Choose Your Partner and What Your Marriage/Committed Relationship is Trying to Teach You** by Susie Itzstein.

You thought you chose your Beloved because they were soft, gentle, loving or maybe strong, dependable, intelligent or playful, handsome, free-spirited, spontaneous, generous, spiritual, good-looking, had a great body, sexy, beautiful.....you know all those gorgeous qualities we place at the head of our lists if we are thinking about what to look for in our ideal partners. But the part of our brain that comes up with all these wonderful qualities is unfortunately **not** the part of us that chooses our partners. There is a hidden reason you picked your partner and a hidden agenda in love relationships. Many theories of relationship espouse this attitude.

I would like to share with you a perspective or a way of looking at relationships that has significantly influenced the way I see the world and all my relationships. It is a synthesis of many theories.

1. Relationships have an **unconscious purpose** that is to get the needs met that weren't met as we were growing up.
2. Every living thing has embedded within it a "blueprint" for what it will become as an adult. This blueprint involves accomplishing certain developmental tasks at specific stages during childhood. All children go through stages of development - for instance being babies and being close and attached to their parents, to then starting to move away and explore the world, to learning how to do tasks and achieve things....and so on. We all go through these stages. Since most people have had less-than-perfect childhoods and have had contact with less-than-perfect people, most people have "childhood wounds". By "wounds" I mean the needs that were not met in childhood and the developmental tasks that were not completely accomplished.
3. Another part of that "blueprint" is that we carry around inside us an image or a picture of the way someone who loves us will treat us and the way I will respond to them and treat them. This image is made up of the positive and negative traits of the people who influenced us at an early age. From earliest childhood, our brains are actually formed and wired according to what is repeated in the environment around us. Whatever is repeated over and over and modelled to us becomes our perception of who we are and what we can expect from the world. Recent scientific research on the brain shows that the neural pathways that are at the basis of our behaviour are formed in relation to the people that are significant to us as we are growing up. Caretakers are most crucial in shaping the child's developing self-image and world-image. Whatever is fired over and over gets wired. *What were the models of behaviour and love that you were exposed to and influenced by?*
4. So unknowingly, we **are drawn to and select partners who are like our parents and they will be unskilled** in helping us to get those very needs met! We bring that agenda to all our adult relationships.

5. And this unconscious agenda is why relationships shift from the place of deepest love to total negativity in the space of seconds. Your husband just “turned into” your father and you swore you would never chose a husband (or wife!) like that! And their behaviour reminds us of all the times we didn’t get our needs met and how hurt we felt.
6. This partner that most matches what we got in the past is also the person who is most able to help you to heal the wounds of your past. Your marriage/relationship becomes the therapy—**you become healed not by a counsellor but by the relationship itself.**

“Most of the serious problems in relationships stem from the fact that people do not understand the true nature of love” says Pat Love in her highly recommended book, “The Truth About Love”. She says that couples have many misconceptions about the nature of love and these lead to destructive conclusions. All relationships go through normal and predictable stages and that many couples mistake the lows for the end of love.

Remember when you fell in love...it was like all your dreams had come true. Like you imagined it would last forever.....At the infatuation/romantic stage we are in a chemically-driven space where we only experience our partners positive qualities and this **is not what love is really about.** This stage doesn’t last and it isn’t meant to. We then move into what we call the power struggle. So what are we to do then as we feel we are living in our worst nightmare as all the negative qualities that we thought we had left behind are showing up? Our partners’ behaviour reminds us of the very things we wanted to get away from when we left home.

### **Is there one thing all couples need to know?**

People need to know what love is, and what love is not—that love is not sexual desire, not infatuation..... Says Pat Love *"It's a misconception that love is a feeling and you either have it, or you don't. The fact is that **loves grows in response to getting your needs met**".*

Find out what your partner needs, what says, “I love you” to your partner and give it as a gift. **Learn how to love your partner in the way they want to be loved.** That’s really a key.

**So paradoxically the proposition I want to put to you is that your greatest growth and life changes will come from stretching into doing the very things that will make your partner feel most loved and cared for....And, which are the hardest for you to do.**

*"This is a revolutionary view of relationships: rather than leaving it to find yourself, you find yourself through it - **being the right partner is more important than picking the right partner.**" Harville Hendrix.*

What does your partner ask you to do that is important to them that you don’t do very well? It might be listening, or talking or not talking, or spending time doing things together, or feeling, or touching, or cuddling, or laughing and playing, or speaking

gently, or dancing, or valuing the way they do things, or going on holidays instead of always working, or being on time, or making love, .....or a million and one things.

What does your partner ask you to do that you continually reject? This again, believe it or not, is your greatest growth edge and opportunity for you to grow into being more of who you truly are. Giving your partner what is hardest to give is healing for them as you are meeting their needs but it is also growthful for you as you have to stretch into doing new behaviours that wasn't OK for you to do as you were growing up. It will feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It won't feel like "being you".

**Love is a DECISION.** It is not just a feeling. **It is a decision we make (or we don't make)** and we make it every day, every minute, **in the way that we behave with one another.** Motivational and management specialist Stephen Covey was asked at one of his seminars by a participant: what do you do when you don't love your wife anymore? He answered: "Go home and love her" And the guy said...but I just told you I don't love her anymore. He replied. "Love is a verb." It is **something that you do.**

It sounds so simple and yet it's so hard to change behaviour - our behaviour. Remember to be kind to yourself as change takes time and practice. And it is good to start with baby steps and give yourself "L" plates. Remember the Chinese proverb: "*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*".

I am inviting you to look at yourself and your life and relationships in a completely new way. Behaving in an intentional and loving way toward your partner is the greatest opportunity you have to help you heal unresolved pain from childhood for yourself as well as for your partner and for both of you to become who you truly are.

I'd like to end with offering you an exercise you might like to do that will throw some light on the unconscious agenda you bring to your adult relationships. Happy Loving!

## **Who is My Perfect Partner – My "Imago Match?"**

### **SECTION 1**

1. Read the sentences below, filling in the blanks with the appropriate words. Choose from the lists of adjectives or add your own.

#### **A. Think of your childhood caretakers. List their negative qualities.**

(Pick at least 5) (For example: absent, abusive, addicted, aggressive, alcoholic, angry, boring, busy, cold, controlling, critical, dangerous, depressed, dishonest, distant, emotional, fragile, grumpy, immature, impatient, insensitive, intrusive, jealous, lazy, passive, passive-aggressive, perfectionist, reactive, rigid, sarcastic, shallow, stingy, unaffectionate, unavailable, unforgiving, uninterested, unreliable, wounding.....others.)

#### **B. Think of frustrating times you had with them and list how you felt.**

(Pick at least 5)

(For example: abandoned, afraid, alone, angry, anxious, ashamed, cheated, cold, depressed, disappointed, distant, embarrassed, frustrated, guilty, hopeless, hurt, inadequate, insecure, jealous, mistrustful, rejected, unloved.....)

**C. Now list their positive qualities.** (Pick at least 5)

For example: accessible, affectionate, altruistic, attentive, available, confident, connected, courageous, creative, dependable, enthusiastic, fair, faithful, forgiving, hard-working, honest, open-minded, playful, respectful, responsible, safe, sincere, spiritual, spontaneous, supportive, talented, tender, tolerant, trustworthy, warm, wise.....)

**D. Think of the pleasant times you had with them and list how you felt.**

(Pick at least 5)

(For example: close, excited, happy, loved, loving peaceful, playful, proud, reassured, respected, safe, satisfied, secure, trusted, warm.....)

**E. List how you most often reacted as a child/teen to those frustrating times.** (Pick at least 5)

(For example: argued, became aggressive, became depressed, became low achieving, became passive, became passive-aggressive, became super-achieving, became rebellious, complained, criticized, distanced, drank, failed, got in fights, isolated, left, nagged, over-ate, slammed doors, slept, starved myself, stayed busy, talked to friends, threw/broke things threw-up, used drugs, whined, withdrew yelled/screamed.....)

**SECTION 2: Transfer your answers from above into the appropriate sections  
My "Perfect" Partner – My "Imago Match"**

**My Unconscious is trying to find a partner who is** (Answers from question A)

**With whom I often feel** (Answers from question B)

**But I'm only trying to get them to become** (Answers from question C)

**so that I can begin to feel** (Answers from question D)

**However, I have sometimes sabotaged getting my needs met because I**  
(Answers from question E)

Do you find these statements to be mostly true of your current and/or previous partners with who you were in a committed relationship with for more than 6 months? Most people do!