

Finding and Keeping Our Balls

We must take responsibility for the projection of our own idealized self onto the other person. We need to have the courage and discipline to develop our *own* qualities, those qualities that allow us the possibility of manifesting our dreams. We must take the responsibility of becoming the kind of person with whom we would want a relationship.

LOVE WITHOUT BLAME

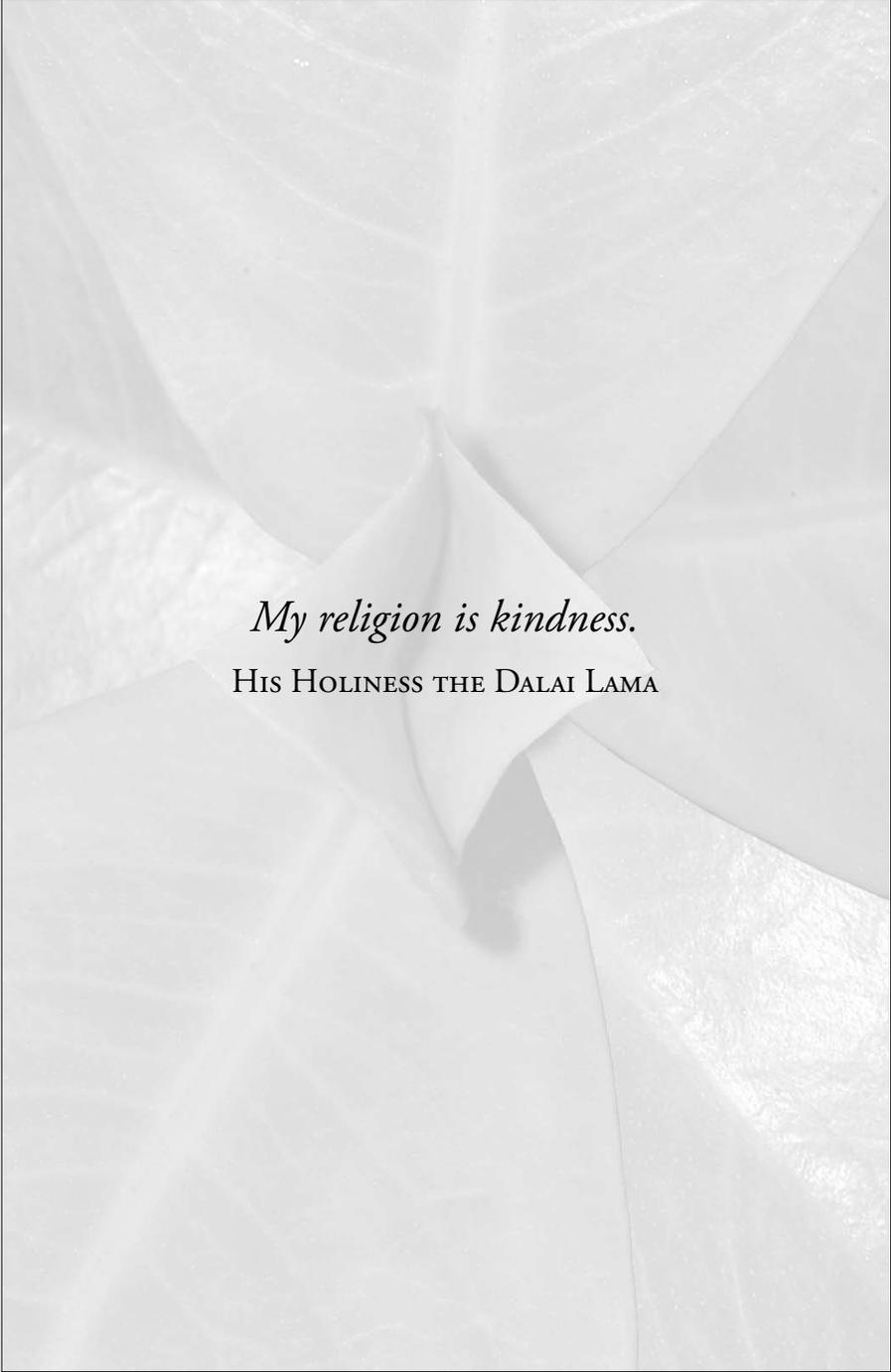
In relationship we must learn how to love without blame.

To love without blame is to fight fair and express pain while still keeping the “long view”. To love without blame is to take responsibility for our choices and our behavior. To love without blame is to grow up, plain and simple.

Why should we love without blame? Because whenever we blame in a relationship we are *actively* trying to avoid responsibility. If we cannot take responsibility for our choices and ourselves in relationship, then we will never be truly nourished by one. When we blame we give away our power, and our balls, to someone else.

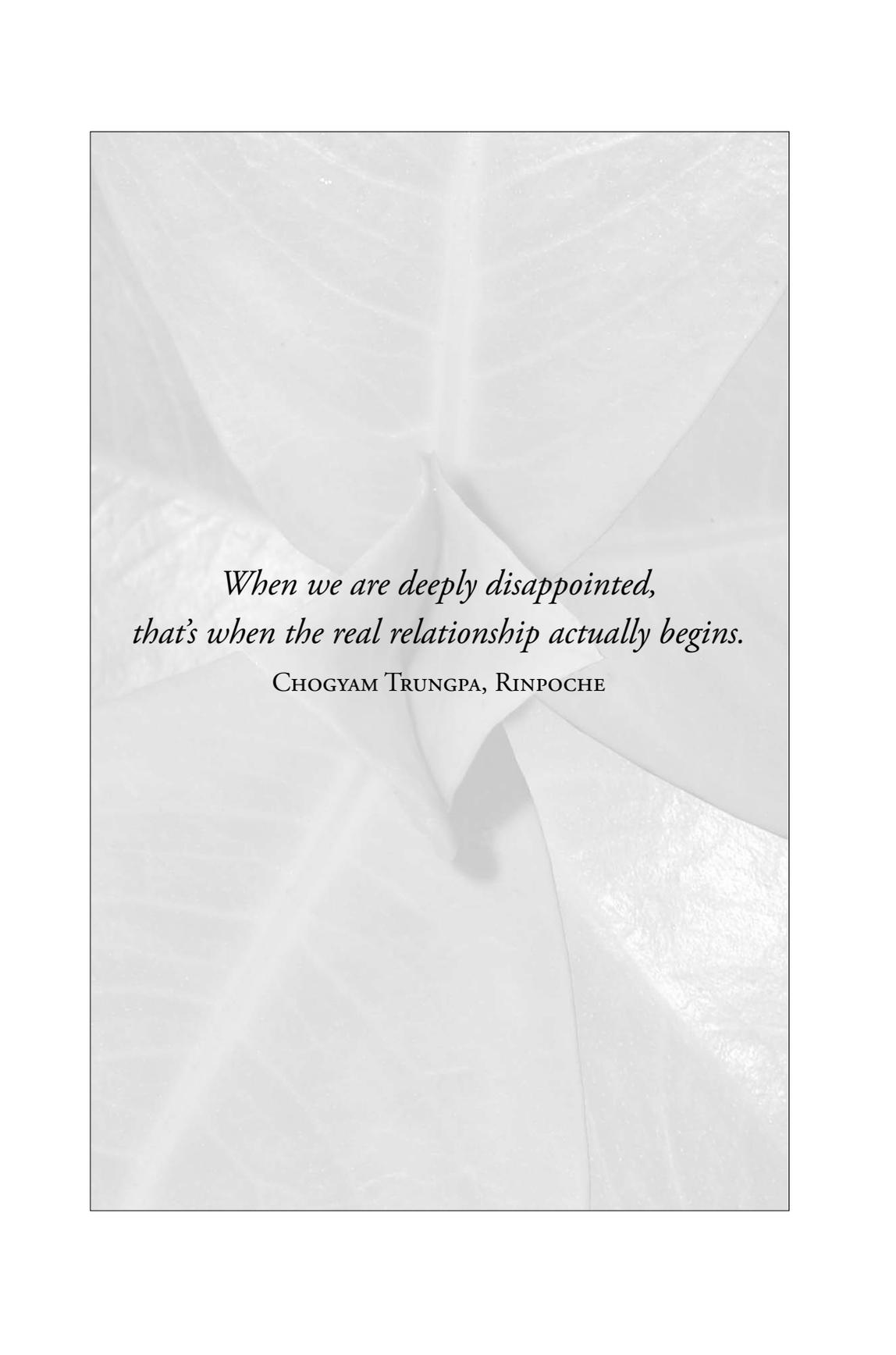
Blame is a poisoned mirror that we must reject. We reject it when it is directed at us, and we reject our own desire to direct it at our partner. Unless we wish to destroy the things most precious to us we should put it aside.

When we retaliate with blame or placate under the pressure of blame we diminish our spirit and smother the shining light of our deepest integrity. In blame we revert to being children. But we are not children; we are men. We can feel anger, even rage, but we can still hold space. We can deny a request or a demand but still hold compassion. And if we cannot hold compassion we can at least hold our tongue. Doing the right thing is at the heart of being a warrior. We can still do the right thing, even when we hate doing the right thing. Every time we do the right thing, the roots in our soul deepen, and we *become* something of substance that we can pass on to our children or to those we love.



My religion is kindness.

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA



*When we are deeply disappointed,
that's when the real relationship actually begins.*

CHOGYAM TRUNGPA, RINPOCHE

Preparing for a Relationship

We must not succumb to the temptation to blame especially when our partner is being a bitch, slinging all kinds of shit and not looking in her *own* mirror. It is when she is acting in this very un-Goddess-like way that we are most likely to give our balls away. If we give in to the temptation to retaliate when she blames, or to placate her when she blames, we might as well just hand her our balls on a platter. Just because we have given her our heart does not mean that we must give away our balls. Our partner may fight from the gutter but we have too much respect for ourselves to go there with her.

How do we do this? How do we love without blame? We love without blame by looking in our mirror and communicating in a way that reflects our integrity. Just as learning a new martial art or dance style requires learning a new body language, so does learning a new relationship skill require us to learn a new emotional language. This will require us to phrase our feelings in unusual ways and learn to express who we are without being critical or demanding. The way we phrase things is a reflection of the assumptions that we bring to our relationships.

There are numerous systems of compassionate communication out there and they are all worth learning. At first, learning such a system may feel stilted... as if we are playing word games. But these are not just word games. The words that we use and the phrases with which we communicate reflect our inner terrain and reveal the assumptions from which we proceed in our relationships. Our phrasing can help us to habitually look into the mirror. It can have a profound influence on the quality of our relationships. As we change the way we phrase things, it can actually help us change the way we think. *Our language can help us to grow up and grow roots.*

Blame and guilt are two sides of the same coin. When our partner blames us she may be saying things about us that are *true*. This is where our integrity comes into play. We must check in with ourselves and be brutally honest. If what she is saying is true then we must self-confront and acknowledge it, at least to ourselves. If we can acknowledge this truth in front of our partner without succumbing to

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guilt or blame, so much the better. But if we cannot expose ourselves without plugging into her guilt loop, then we should make a mental note that she has nailed us in a very unloving way. And we must make a commitment to ourselves to address these issues so that we can become the man that we want to be.

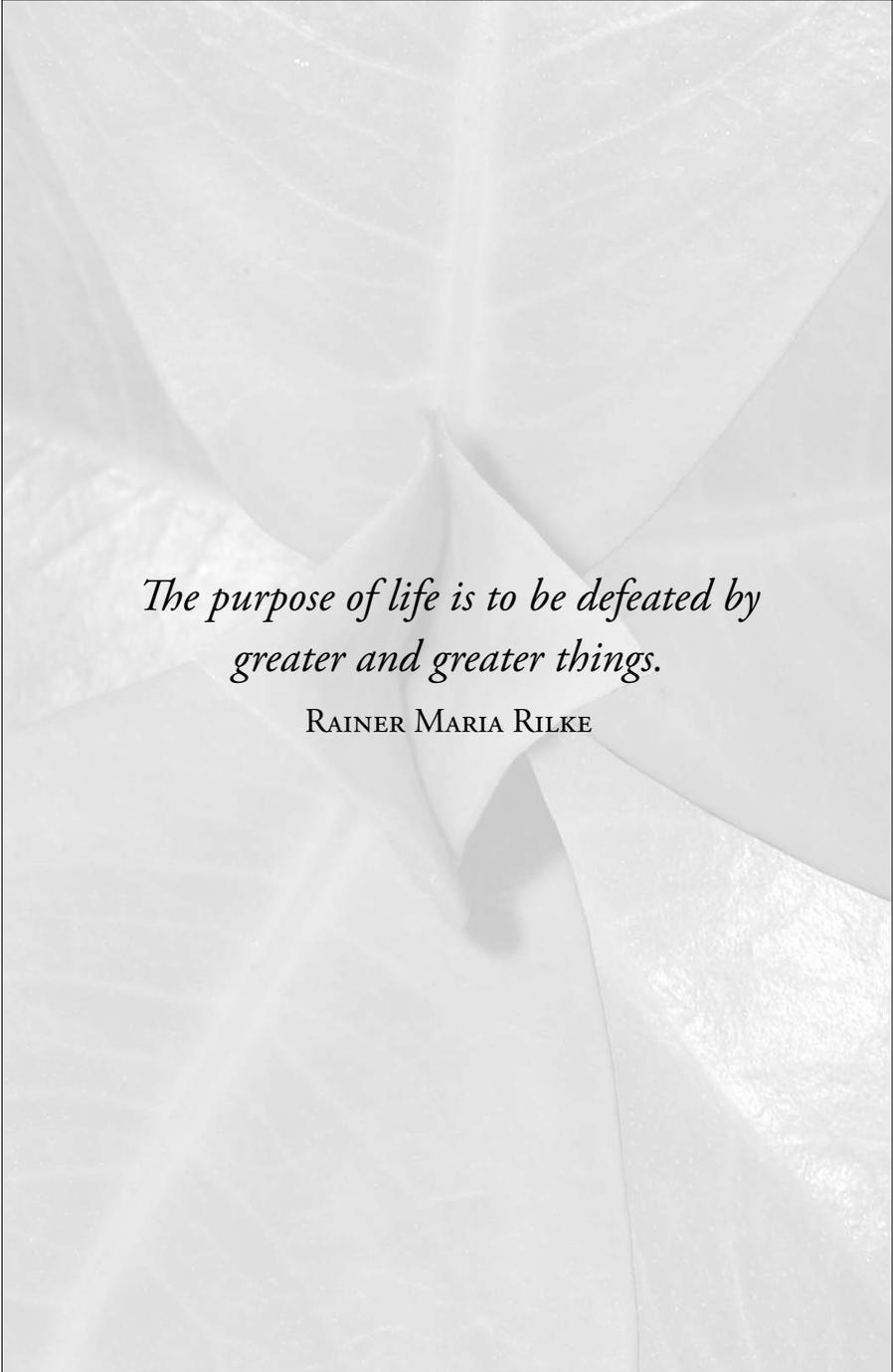
But it is equally important that we reject the way she presents the information to us. This is crucial. Being *right* in a relationship is not enough. There are many other ways that she may have expressed her disapproval of us, the most obvious of which is to make a request for us to change our behavior. The very fact that she did not or could not express her displeasure without resorting to blame says something significant about her.

We can set strong boundaries without indulging in blame. As a matter of fact, strong boundaries are often best expressed in a quiet voice. Sometimes the louder we speak the less we are heard. We can express strong anger without blame, although if the anger is *too* large, we often will be better off walking away and coming back when we have cooled off a bit.

The degree to which we can be in relationship without dishing out or absorbing blame is a direct measure of how much we still have our balls. Our ability to keep our balls is often a measure of how resilient we are in handling our own emotional pain.

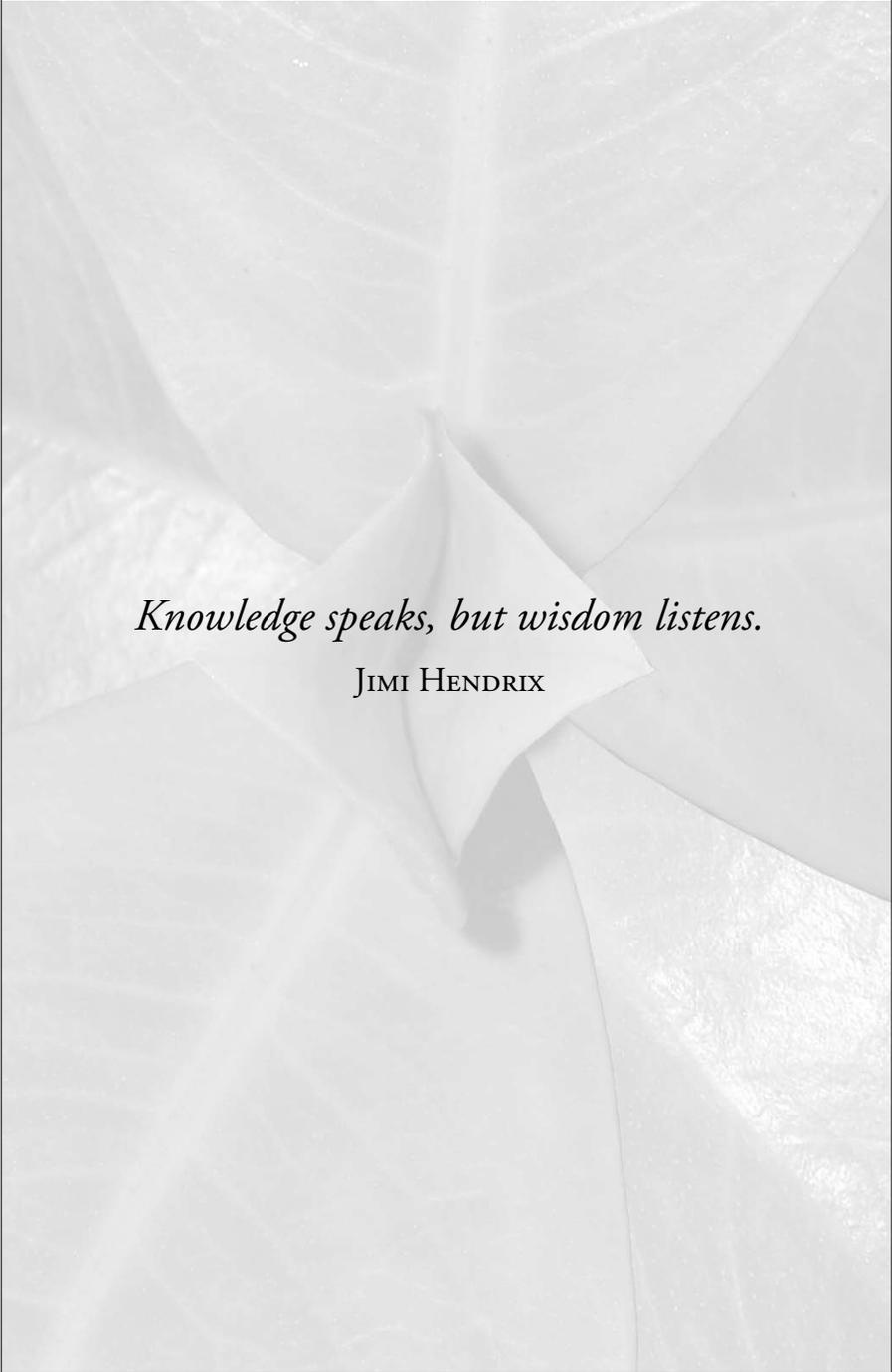
EMOTIONAL PAIN

Blame is always an expression of internal emotional pain. We will experience emotional pain in our relationship; we can count on it. Our partner *will* trigger our emotional pain... that is what partners do. But just because we are in pain does not mean that someone necessarily did something “wrong”. This is a remarkably tricky situation. There are three possibilities in the scenario of our pain. The first is that our partner is acting in an inappropriate way given the context of our relationship and our previous agreements. In this case their inappropriate behavior is triggering our feelings of pain. The



*The purpose of life is to be defeated by
greater and greater things.*

RAINER MARIA RILKE



Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens.

JIMI HENDRIX

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second is that our partner is behaving in an appropriate way and that our pain is arising from our shadow. The third is a combination of these two: That our partner is behaving inappropriately *and* an issue within our shadow has been triggered. *No matter which of the above scenarios turns out to be true, we must forgo the temptation of trying to wound our partner when we are in pain.* This frequent retaliatory wounding is not forgotten and healed; we simply store it away to later emerge as muscle tension, digestive ulcers, psoriasis, or tumors. When there is conflict and the possibility of recrimination, we must sort out what is our shadow from what is our partner's. This can be difficult to do and takes some perspective, distance, maturity, and self-honesty. When we are hooked or in reaction, this is the wrong time to sort things out. We should go and cool off, returning later to try to make sense of what has happened.

And we should remember that every incidence of emotional pain that we experience is an invitation for us to move toward our healing.

VALIDATING OUR PARTNER

Active listening is the process of listening to our partner with the intention of reflecting her feelings back to her. The idea of active listening is that when we reflect someone's feelings back to them, we may improve the quality of our relationship with that person.

Like compassionate communication, validating our partner's feelings can also seem like a word game. But validating is also the verbal equivalent of growing our own roots.

Validating our partner's feelings is always a good idea. Not mandatory, but a good idea. Notice that I said validating her *feelings*. We can validate her feelings without validating her behavior or agreeing with her judgments or perceptions. We do not need to validate her blaming or slinging shit or throwing things, but we may be able to validate the fact that she is angry.

Of course when *we* are in deep process and angry as hell, we are not likely to validate her, and that is fine. But if we can do it without

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making ourselves crazy, validating our partner's feelings can be a good investment in our future relationship. It can allow our partner to feel *heard*, and *too few people in long-term relationships feel truly heard by their partner*.

A second benefit to validating our partner is that when we validate her, especially when she is saying something that we do not want to hear, we also drive our own roots deeper into our soil. If we can separate her needs and feelings from our own, we may recognize that we each can have valid individual perspectives and biases. In validating our partner, we may be able to reclaim our foundation.

Let's say this again: When we validate her feelings we are not *agreeing* with what she says, we are simply *acknowledging* that she has her own perspective. Our perspective will often be different. In validating our partner we can simultaneously differentiate and validate ourselves.

Of course, *we cannot and should not expect our partner to validate our feelings*. That is our job. If she does, that is great. But ultimately we need to be validating our own feelings, not waiting for our partner to do it for us.

PRIORITIZING RELATIONSHIP VALUES

If we plan on keeping our balls, we will need to know who we are. Knowing who we are means knowing our values, particularly our relationship values, and referring back to them often. Values are best organized in a hierarchy, not because we need to be rigid and dogmatic, but because when we can prioritize our values, it means that we have examined them in a significant way and considered them from multiple perspectives. *See Appendix 1 for more on relationship values.*

DO WE WANT IT WIDE OR DO WE WANT IT DEEP?

How many women can we *handle*? How many do we *want* to handle? Some men claim that they can be involved with more than one part-