

CHAPTER THREE

Practicing Mutual Awakening



*When you make the two, one
and when you make the inner as the outer and the above as below,
and when you make the male and the female into a single one,
then you shall enter the Kingdom.*

~ The Gospel of Thomas

When Peter and I were together, we never used a particular technique to generate the intense experience of mutuality that we shared. We simply surrendered to each other and to the relationship, by following whatever was unfolding between us. In this way, we were led to ever-greater heights of openness, intimacy, presence, and transformation. Maintaining a continuous sense of connectedness was our way of being together, and the thought of developing a “practice” out of our shared experience never occurred to me. The intensity of love and the desire to be as close as possible was what motivated us.

After I lost Peter, I was left in the confusing and painful position of carrying our shared awakening alone. He was gone, and yet I still felt our

ongoing connection. Eventually, after a period of intense grieving, I was driven to understand what had happened to me and felt the need to recreate the same depth of mutuality in my life with others. So I began a deep examination of my experience with Peter to truly discover what had made our dual awakening possible.

I spent many years studying with various teachers, driven by these questions: *How do I give people access to this powerful and catalytic dimension of consciousness? How do I share it and enter into it again with others?* Eventually, I discovered how to recreate the experience. I found myself able to use simple exercises that would consistently give people access to this kind of mutuality.

Today, I have identified “Eight Activating Principles” that help us turn toward each other and catalyze this unique consciousness. Through the remainder of this book, I will be sharing these principles, so that you can experiment with others to achieve mutual awakening. To start, I’ll share a foundational practice which I used with Paula and Samuel and thousands of others to awaken this deeper dimension of relatedness.

Are You Ready for an Evolutionary Relationship?

I’m sure that many people reading this book have deep and loving relationships, and maybe you have glimpsed the kind of potential I’ve been describing with a lover or a friend. Perhaps you’ve had “peak” experiences but never considered that you could share that elevated consciousness with another person. Or maybe you’ve never had that experience, but some part of you has always yearned for it.

You also may be in a relationship that has grown stale, or perhaps you feel trapped in an unhappy marriage. This book is not intended to help you to “fix” a damaged relationship — there are many other wonderful teachers and counselors who can help in such cases. But for those of you who are ready to consciously create something new with a partner or friend who shares that intention, this book will show you how you can develop and open yourself to the extraordinary potentials that are awaiting you in this new domain of relatedness.

Additionally, this book will help you activate the evolutionary potential for higher relatedness by introducing you to powerful practices and principles for catalyzing deeper connectedness. This doesn't mean you can force the process or that you'll be able to predict how it will unfold. The process includes a mysterious element, which neither you nor I can control. For example, I did not "manifest" Peter in my life, with all the miraculous joy, wisdom, and awakening he brought. But I did make myself "available" for the sort of relationship which Peter offered, by listening to my deepest longing, by letting my desire take me into places I had never gone before, and by opening my heart to possibilities I had never dared let myself consider.

Recently a friend and spiritual scholar told me about a Sufi practice of ecstatic communion called *sohbet*. In the Sufi tradition, there are three ways to access the divine: prayer, meditation, and *sohbet*, with *sohbet* considered the most powerful method. Although the practice is described in different ways — with some claiming that language is inadequate to capture its subtlety — *sohbet* often is defined as "companionship in conversation." This type of communion relies on ancient, oral traditions. Through storytelling, mystical love and knowledge is shared between practitioners, "in such a way that it attempts to circumvent the knots of the rational mind and connect the hearts of the seekers. *Sohbet* can be understood as a spiritual dialogue, a cleansing of the soul and a meeting of the hearts."¹

Scholar Olga Louchakova describes *sohbet* as a heart-to-heart dialogue. She explains, "The lived experience of participants in the *sohbet* is treated as an alive body of emerging sacred text, consciousness in the process of becoming. It is a sincere, kind, conscious conversation around meaningful and essential issues ... among people having no operating defenses or power agendas."²

I like to imagine that *sohbet* is what Rumi and Shams shared — a spiritual transmission of divine love, which utterly transforms and unites both people. Long after Peter died, I read Rumi's poetry, in which he agonizingly longs for his Beloved. For the first time, I felt someone understood my pain and the depth of my loss, and I was fascinated to learn that Peter and Rumi shared the same birthday. Although I've never practiced *sohbet*, I feel a strong connection with this ancient tradition, as it seems closely aligned in spirit with the practice I call mutual awakening.

Finding the Right Partner

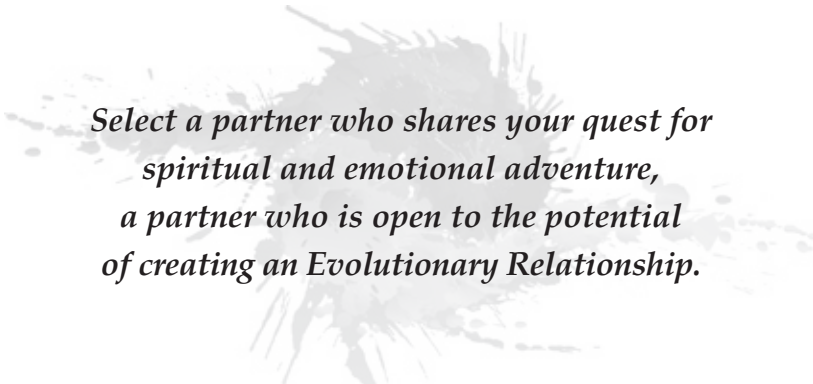
Because it is impossible to experience mutual awakening by yourself, to get the most out of this book, you will need a partner. Moreover, many of the exercises I'll be sharing are designed to be done by two people, so I highly recommend that you find a partner with whom you feel comfortable exploring the concept of mutual awakening. At this point in the book, perhaps someone already has come to mind — a close friend, a lover, or even a new connection—someone you know who also is interested in these potentials. If so, I suggest you talk to that person and ask that he or she read the book with you. Then, you can move through the practices together.

Often, as human beings, we hesitate when trying something new. We wait to be invited and often don't create the opening for engagement and participation. This book is about a new domain of consciousness that is rare, still new, and mostly unexplored. So you will need to be the inviter and the innovator. You will need to extend yourself by approaching someone first and assuming the risk and the difficulty of sharing something novel with that person. Some of your friends may not be ready, but you may be surprised to find that the longing for deep connection lives in all of us. Not everyone is conscious of this longing yet, but if you take the initiative and extend yourself, you likely will be touched by the beautiful responses you receive. And don't be surprised if the very act of asking someone to share this book with you awakens in that person a deep desire that he or she previously had not identified or admitted.

When thinking about an appropriate partner, choose someone with whom you already are in relationship, one which you feel has unrealized potentials. Ask yourself: *Does this relationship have the capacity for more openness? Could more unfold between us?* If the answer to these questions is "yes," then take a leap of faith and ask that person to read this book with you.

As mentioned before, the right person might not be your spouse or lover. If you contemplate the people in your life, you probably will know who to ask. If in doubt, consider this analogy: Most Ferraris sit in the garage, are rarely used, and hardly ever get the chance to reach their full

capacity. Similarly, most relationships never realize their full potential due to the conventional way that most people connect. So think about who in your life has the capacity, energy, time and freedom to truly evolve.



*Select a partner who shares your quest for
spiritual and emotional adventure,
a partner who is open to the potential
of creating an Evolutionary Relationship.*

On the other hand, if you honestly cannot think of anyone with whom to explore mutual awakening, then please re-read the Prologue and Chapter One, and allow yourself to feel the longing for an Evolutionary Relationship. By keeping that longing alive, you will begin to attract people who are willing and ready to share a deeper connection. In the meantime, I encourage you to finish reading this book to prepare you for an Evolutionary Relationship when the appropriate person comes into your life.

Experiences of Mutual Awakening

I have taught mutual awakening to thousands of people all over the world, yet I find it an ever-new and always fascinating experience. The Mutual Awakening Practice is an exercise that you and your partner can return to again and again, and I will be inviting you to do it at the end of this chapter and as a warm-up exercise before some of the longer practices in this book. I love to hear what my students say about the Mutual Awakening Practice that is contained at the end of this chapter, especially if it is their first time doing the exercise. Here are a few descriptions from some of my students:

First I asked my partner, “What are you experiencing right now?” And I listened in rapt silence as she spoke for ten minutes in words that could have just as easily been my own. Her words resonated between us as “ours,” holding the enormity, grit, and depth of humanity’s stretch into something beyond itself — miraculously held, preciously and delicately between us.

~Bernard, from Brooklyn, New York

When my turn to speak came, words poured out, adding another frame of down-to-earth details from a different life’s perspective, adding to what we were together, building on it, going beyond and beyond again. The space in which we meet — what we are together — holds us in its power. The energy in the body is strong, the air shimmers, the space between us is alive and vibrant.

~Alice, from Berkeley, California

In response to “What are we experiencing?” — we traded words, first from one then the other, hardly noticing who was speaking which phrase, adding to each other, building something together. I cannot fully explain what transpired, but I remember the awe!

~ Simon, from London, UK

The first time I engaged in the mutual awakening process, I sat across from someone I did not know, except for her first name. As we leaned into each other, I had the profound and profoundly simple experience of falling into love, of being pulled into the field of love that existed between us. All we had to do was be present and it revealed itself so strongly, so beautifully, beyond definition, pretense, and identity. One of the purest experiences of love in my life.

~ Vibeke, Amsterdam, from the Netherlands

While doing a mutual awakening practice, I began to describe my experience with emotions and how my physical body was feeling. Then the curiosity dropped deeper, and I began to describe qualities like openness, heavy areas, various colors blending, words like “melting bubbles” and “emerging oppositions” came out and I didn’t know what I was talking about. But I was “seeing” it and intensely interested.

When I expanded my attention to include my partner, the “seeing” became brighter and somehow came closer. During the time when we shared what we were both experiencing, often we would say the same words, and we even discovered that we had the same taste in our mouths. I also noticed that sometimes silence would drop in so deeply that it took much effort to speak. It’s a very mysterious process and it evoked a passionate yearning for me to feel deeper into my everyday experiences.

~ Ryan, from Dublin, Ireland

Practicing Together

Each chapter in this book contains practices and exercises, some of which are done on your own, either in silent contemplation or through journal writing. The most important practices, though, are those you will do with your partner, and the foundational exercise is the Mutual Awakening Practice which follows. Think of this practice as fundamental to mutual awakening in the same way that meditation is fundamental to individual awakening.

I recommend that you and your partner do the Mutual Awakening Practice at least once or twice a week for the first couple months, as you begin to explore this new inter-subjective terrain. Just remember to be patient — with yourself and with each other. This exercise will be your first deep dive into Evolutionary Relationships. It will require both of you staying open, deeply receptive, and simultaneously focused and attuned to yourself, each other, and the unfolding sense of the shared field. It will feel like you’re learning a new dance. At first, you may feel awkward and step on each other’s toes a bit. Midway through the book, you will start to feel

more skillful and begin to dance in resonance. Eventually, if you continue to practice and use the activating principles, you will know how it feels to “be danced” by something much greater than yourselves.

When you do an awakening practice with another person, I suggest that you approach the exercise with consciousness and care, just as you would if you were going to meditate by yourself. Create a safe space where you won’t be disturbed, where you can relax and really be together. Before you begin each practice with your partner, close your eyes and spend two to ten minutes in silence. Let the momentum of the day slow down and let yourselves arrive in the moment together, ready to focus and fully available to each other.

Make sure both of you have taken time to read the relevant parts of the chapter, so that you have the context within which to do the practice. You also might take a few minutes and share with each other how you feel about entering into a particular practice together. Also, read the practice through first, so you feel clear about exactly how to do it and what to expect. Then begin.

Lastly, stay relaxed doing the exercises and venturing into this new domain of relatedness. It’s new for all of us, so dismiss all worries about “doing it right.” Simply follow the instructions and appreciate whatever happens, whatever emerges and evolves. And don’t forget to appreciate yourself and your partner during the process. Thank you for accepting this invitation to experience mutual awakening.

EXERCISE:

Mutual Awakening Practice

The Mutual Awakening Practice is an exercise you do with a partner — whether a spouse, lover, friend, colleague, or even someone you’ve recently met — provided that person shares your interest in deepening the experience of mutuality. This practice is a portal to the profound dynamism of shared being. Like meditation, it is a simple practice but it requires focus, precision, and surrender to develop the capacity to enter into this space with reliability. So please be patient with yourself and your partner as you work with this practice.

It is best to be in the same room as your partner, but if this is not possible, you can adapt these instructions for use by video conference or telephone. The practice typically takes about 45 minutes, so make sure you have set aside enough time and will be free from distractions and interruptions.

Read through these instructions from beginning to end before you start the practice. You may prefer to use the audio download of these instructions, which is available at my website: www.EvolutionaryCollective.com.

Step 1: Connect with Yourself

Sit opposite your partner, preferably on chairs that are of equal height. You may want to set a timer for 5 minutes so that you don’t need to watch the clock.

This first step is designed to help you connect with your authentic self by feeling an intimacy and closeness with yourself and your experience. Close your eyes and invite yourself to arrive and be fully present. Give attention to your body and open up your consciousness to include whatever physical sensations you are feeling. Don’t narrow your focus, but rather be open to the totality of what is present in your body. Note the particular sensations that come into your awareness.

Next, turn your attention to your heart and emotions, opening up another channel of awareness and closeness with yourself, while retaining consciousness of your body. Notice if there are any strong reactions or subtle effects or moods present.

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Lastly, include your mind. Focus on the sensation and movement of thoughts through your awareness, rather than their content. Notice if there is a sense of fogginess and confusion, or lightness and clarity. Observe whether your mind is active and agitated or quiet and still.

Take a deep breath and accept and include all of the experience that is present — in your body, your heart, and your mind. Now open your eyes.

Step 2: Connect with Each Other

The second step is about connecting with your partner. As you open your eyes, allow yourself to include the other person in your awareness, just as you opened to include the various levels of your own experience. Simply allow yourself to be present, experiencing whatever you might be apprehending as you allow your partner to be there with you. Look into each other's eyes as you do this.

After about a minute, ask yourself: *Am I the right distance from my partner for the optimum connection?* Don't think about this with your mind; listen for what intuitively feels right. Experiment together, moving closer and farther away, until you discover a distance where the connection is easy to find and feel. It may feel a little uncomfortable or too intimate, but be courageous in discovering the position that allows you to feel the connection. I recommend that you err on the side of "too close."

Next, set a timer for 5 minutes. Once you are settled, simply look into each other's eyes and allow the other to exist in your field of awareness and relatedness. There is nothing to do, no special experience that should or shouldn't be happening, just an allowing and including of yourself and the other.

Step 3: What Are You Experiencing?

This step allows each of you to focus deeply and completely on the other. Set a timer for 10 minutes and decide which of you will go first. If you are starting, then your partner will ask you the question: *What are you experiencing right now?*

Be open, transparent, and intimate with whatever is arising in your experience and share it as directly as you can. Describe the experience with textures, temperature, color, structures, shapes, images, and feelings, rather than concepts. For example, a concept might be, "I feel agitated," but the direct

experience would be, "There's a shakiness, a very slight vibration through my lower belly. I can feel a hint of sadness, an achiness moving through the left side of my body. Now there's a light in the distance that I'm aware of ..." and so on.

Release yourself from the need to "make sense" or entertain your partner. Whatever you are experiencing, just follow it, staying close to where your experience is originating. If something shifts mid-sentence, that's fine. Let it lead you where it wants to go. If you feel nothing, ask yourself: *Exactly what is the "nothing" I am present to?*

If from time to time you want to close your eyes in order to focus on something that is arising, feel free to do that, but then open your eyes again to share the experience with your partner. Don't edit or censor your perceptions — stay open, curious, and vulnerable. Follow anything that you feel pulled to explore more deeply. You're not trying to get anywhere or solve a problem. Your goal is to simply stay close to what is arising and articulate it to your partner as directly as possible.

When the 10 minutes is up, set the timer again and switch roles. Ask your partner: *What are you experiencing right now?* Now your job is to focus as deeply and completely on your partner as you can. You want to be so close in your active listening that you feel your partner's experience as they express it. If it feels right, from time to time you can ask the question freshly for them to answer.

You will find that if you truly stay close to your partner and their immediate experience, your own thoughts will disappear. Conversely, if you have the conscious command to think about what they are saying or to judge them, you aren't focused closely enough.

Ideally, this practice gives you 10 minutes to completely let go of your normal identification with your own interior space and to focus completely on the other person to the point where you begin to actualize their experience as your own. Initially, you may not be able to empathize at this deep level nor to hold that space for the full ten minutes. But keep trying. Let go of yourself, give your energy to your partner, and see what can happen.

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Step 4: What Are We Experiencing?

The final step is to focus on the space between you both. Set the timer for 10 minutes, and this time ask the question: *What are we experiencing right now?*

In order to answer this question, both of you will need to place your attention on the space between you — the place where your consciousness overlaps. Rather than going one at a time, take short turns answering the question, looping back and forth between you.

As you go back and forth, try not to answer with your mind, but rather let yourself speak from the space of the connection — the we-space. The question is not: *What do you think we are experiencing?* The point of the exercise is to access what the we-space has to say. A good way to keep this exercise on track is to start your answer with: *We are experiencing ...* This may feel a little strange at first, but within a few minutes, you will discover a flow together.

At the end of the 10 minutes, thank your partner. The practice is now over. If you have the time, close your eyes and notice the influence that the practice has had on you. Feel into your own experience and notice where you are now. Does it feel different to where you were at the beginning of the practice? Each partner also might like to share how this first exercise on mutual awakening felt. ☪

Notes

- 1 Sufi Path of Love, <http://sufipathoflove.com/sufism>.
- 2 Olga Louchakova, “The Experience of Sohbet,” International Association of Sufism, <http://www.ias.org/spf/sohbet.html>.