Deeply lived-through compassion can bring healing into our relationships and from there draw circles. Through intimate dialogue with one’s partner and – to give perspective – with all other creatures of nature, the world can change itself from within.
At the age of 28 I wander all alone through the mountain landscape of the Greek island of Samos. The clear air, the scents of the wildflowers, the vast stillness of the mountain paths create in me an unexpected opening. All of a sudden it is there ... the great Being overwhelms me ... It is a quiet, tender hint of fully new perceptions and feelings.

After many years of struggle, fighting, despair and desorientation I sense in this moment:

*Everything in my life is going to change and be different! I am being called to take part in a massive and powerful adventure!* 

And this adventure has something to do with intimacy. (*intimus* in Latin means “innermost”).

I ascend a mountain from which I gain a far reaching, clear view of green hills and the ocean. But I am not actually in the external, but rather, “in the innermost”- I experience the greatest familiarity and intimacy with the Essence, with my Being. For two days long I sit on the peak and ponder, how things should go in my life now.

Will I retreat into myself for some years in one of the many monasteries on the island of Samos, in order to practice meditation and self-absorption, immersed in seclusion? Or does my task lie at home “in the middle of life”, in the engaging of myself in the mirky and strenuous day-to-day life with relationships, children, job and household?

I sit and ponder: It lasts two days, until I come to a conclusion : Yes, I will drive home, I will take on responsibility. And in my case that will mean: I will get married, start a family ... The Adventure of Intimacy can run its course.

**What a partnership in depth means**

In the Hindu wedding ceremony there is a central component, the “Saptapadi”. Wife and husband circle the ring of fire seven times.

In today’s view – 35 years of marriage later – I find this ritual to be a wonderful symbol. In all the details here are drawn the gestures of what a partnership in its depths means:

* As woman and man we move ourselves circularly around the fire of our innermost
In our central fire-element we are – if everything is in order – in the most intimate way bound together, but we are not allowed to get too close to the fire.

We shouldn’t stand silently watching, we should stay constantly in motion. In the atmosphere of the central fire we can metamorphose with the help of the other.

By the “7 times circling of the fire” there will be a great creative energy set aflame.

At the same time our dark sides, our slag waste byproduct and handicaps, our unrefined and unpolished coarseness will always be more thoroughly and intensively lit up. This is a most challenging process.

It takes time (seven stages of development).

It requires a great amount of attention for one another and a growing inner stability, to recognize yourself and the other, to work with the “recognized” and to fruitfully transmute it.

When I look back, I have to admit, that I had no idea at all of the depths of a partnership. I skidded more or less unprepared into this adventure. Already in the phase of falling in love it was difficult for me to say and feel an unconditional “yes” to and for the other. That sensual feeling of oneself being drawn to the other is not yet an affirmation of his or her inner Being. Can I accept and appreciate the other in his/her immutable uniqueness?

No, I could not. I couldn’t because I had not yet learned even once to accept and like myself in my immutable uniqueness.

Nevertheless, I let myself fall into the relationship. We allowed nearness, we sought congruence, but a true “intimacy” did not arise up from out of it.

What is meant by intimacy?

Only much later did I learn that there is a big difference between “nearness” and “intimacy”.

“Nearness” means to allow the other to get close to me and get to know me. This can be in either physical proximity or emotional proximity.

By “Intimacy” is meant, on the other hand, “that one understands and opens oneself in the presence of the other”. Intimacy means, that through that which one says or does, one truthfully brings out his personal, his innermost, his unique inner feelings and thoughts and thereby experiences himself through this self-surrendering, this self-divulgement.” [1]

We can philosophize for years about this interrelationship between Woman and Man, we can experience our existential incompleteness and imperfection in painful processes and observe that also our most beloved partner cannot make up for this “soul deficiency”. As a consequence, we can busy ourselves with the high spiritual idea that within us – every woman and every man – there is a “Spirit Child”, a fully new creation wanting to evolve, when we give ourselves over in complete dedication to the Other within us, to the Divine Spark. This is a very important revelation in and out of the Light. But with this light-filled perspective we must, in the end, venture and face the hazards of the dark recesses of our day-to-day lives. There is much to discover there, much to throw light upon.

In every peak that we conquer, we must turn around and bring His power and enlightenment down into in our mortal movements.

Sri Aurobindo

Am I ready for honest self-realisation, sincere self-surrender, even in the presence of the other person?

The interexchange about that, where we find consensus, feels good. Especially in the beginning of a relationship we validate one through the other again and again with our shared views. This is called “extrinsically confirmed intimacy”. Thereby I feel secure with my partner, I can express myself openly, without fear. But this “hiding under the same covers”, giving oneself a feeling of well being through shared feelings, has a short shelf life, as a rule.

A team proves itself not in still waters.
Tobias Ruland

_The truth begins as two together._

Lukas Michael Moeller

The key for continual intimacy lies on the other hand therein, that I and my partner undergo and practice moments of “self affirmed intimacy”. What does this mean exactly?

I want to confide in the other. I want to reveal or share something unclear or even embarrassing with my partner. It can also be that something my partner did to me or said, scared me or made me mad. Foremost, it is very important that I engage with my partner in a calm manner and not with reproach.

I am going to take a risk. Can my partner navigate around the “stress” released through the baring of my secret innermost thoughts? Does he/she possess a certain amount of steadfastness and self-reassurance?

To help me understand: My partner must not mirror or not find good, what I have revealed. _It is solely and singularly about, that he or she openly listens to my positions, my perspectives, and not punish me for what I have made public, for example, through “becoming enraged”, “demanding justification”, “running away”, “pushing away”, “freezing up”._ These are the most common negative reactions. For longstanding relationships it often happens, that a partner who was pushed away in connection to a certain subject in a long ago dispute, no longer brings up this subject and stays in their turtle shell, shutting it out.

_Do we have confidence in ourselves?_

Do we trust ourselves to discover and speak about the shadows within us, the yet to be clarified, the possibly embarrassing, the possibly unsettling, by way of “circling the fire together”? When we really want to be there for our partner as a soul companion, then we give them this trusted, intimate space. We listen to them without judgment or prejudice.

This is an exchange that demands a great deal of sensitivity and attention. I have to be aware of, to know, my weaknesses, tricks and snares that can suddenly jump up out of my subconscious like stumbling blocks and barriers. I know I shouldn’t always
step into these traps. And yet it happens again and again ...
In mutual practicing of this “self reassuring intimacy” (I trust myself to lay open my secret thoughts without the security of my partner’s reassurance) I come to know myself and the other very intensely.

Yes, it will become possible in time, to draw something like a topographical “relationship-roadmap”. I can see and recognize on this map my mountains, my valleys and my swamps. My highs and my lows – as well as those of my partner.

Thereto belong all my so-called “inner children”, my unchipped and unpolished “slag”, my unresolved conflict-constellations in this life and in the earlier lives of my microcosm’s [2] predecessors ...

We all know the forms of expression of these “inner children”. They are the various masks of our egocentric behavior. They are described in the “Purgatory” of Dante’s Divine Comedy:

... quick to be insulted ... becoming angry ... impatient ... hungry and dependent upon acknowledgment ... always wanting to have the last word ... having to be right ... running away when things get critical ... falling into a bottomless, sullen abyss ... acting out like a class clown ... being envious ... hungry for recognition ... being over ambitious and agitated ...

Then suddenly and unexpectedly these “unruly inner children” break forth out of my subconscious ... they demand to be heard, to be noticed, but not to be “punished” or “pushed away”.

• Can I engage them in an “intimate dialogue”?
• Can I take responsibility for them out of the tranquility of the soul connection, give them a settling answer, without letting them drag me emotionally along? (In Dante’s Divine Comedy, Dante had Virgil as a calming, neutral companion.)
• Can we, in the partnership, become calm companions for each other, step-by-step, through the many times “circling of the fire”, so that we may develop a maturity that allows us, stress free, to place our “dark sides” in the light?

It is not we who are in a position to clear away these shadows in the end, but rather, the Inner Fire. In this light experience all darkness can be transformed.

In the end it depends upon my learning to feel the pain of the yet-imperfect, the flawed. Within myself the new direction giving antenna of the senses can develop, so
that I can also feel in myself as a burning, all the harm I’ve done to others, like an all-consuming fire. At the same time, though, also as a freeing stream, that I cannot hold back, in which all my doubts and uncertainty become fluid and can be transmuted ...

When I sense this inner burning deep in my being, when tears of the deepest empathy with myself and with others are allowed to flow out of me, then I stand in this moment in a true experience with the “Adventure of Intimacy”.

Despair is the result of every serious attempt to understand and vindicate human life. Despair is the result of every serious attempt to go through life with virtue, justice and understanding and to fulfil their requirements. Children live on one side of despair, the awakened on the other side.

Hermann Hesse, The Journey to the East


[2] “Microcosm” points to the eternal being that goes from incarnation to incarnation, carrying the experiences of many lives. In its center lies the spark of the “true self” of a human being.