Why Talking Is Not Enough

Eight Loving Actions That Will Transform Your Marriage

Susan Page
More Praise for *Why Talking Is Not Enough*

“This is a clear and practical presentation of how to bring spiritual principles into everyday relationships. Susan Page presents essential information that will help every couple create more love and harmony in their life.”

—Barbara De Angelis, author, *How Did I Get Here?*

“I love this book! It is truly a treasure. Susan courageously shows us why we need to stop talking about problems and start taking loving action. She clearly describes the actions we need to take to create loving, spiritually growing relationships. If you are having problems in your relationship, or you want to make your relationship even better than it is, read this book!”

—Margaret Paul, coauthor, *Do I Have to Give Up Me to Be Loved by You?* and *Healing Your Aloneness*; and author, *Inner Bonding* and *Do I Have to Give Up Me to Be Loved by God?*

“This exciting new book is a gem. It is one of the best presentations I’ve ever seen of how to bring spiritual principles into everyday relationships. Page is not talking about meditating for a weekend but about how to live your spirituality every day. This wonderful book presents a shift in consciousness that will help couples have a great relationship for a lifetime. I strongly recommend this book for all couples and singles who want to be the best possible partner they can be, now and in the future.”

—Howard J. Markman, coauthor, *12 Hours to a Great Marriage* and *Fighting for Your Marriage*

“This book describes an entirely new way for intimate partners to relate based on spiritual principles. In clear, simple language, Susan Page offers practical concepts and experiments that can improve your relationship in no time at all.”

—Kathlyn and Gay Hendricks, authors, *Conscious Loving* and *Spirit-Centered Relationships*

“This book is like the Buddha channeled by Ann Landers! As a pastor, I have given away many copies of this book to people struggling in intimate relationships—and I’ve used it in my own marriage. There are many classics of spiritual wisdom and many nuts-and-bolts self-help books on relationships. Susan Page brilliantly combines the two. Her gift is to translate spiritual ideals into practical, understandable, and eminently achievable goals for everyday living in Spiritual Partnership. Read it, apply the lessons, and transform yourself and your relationship.”

—The Rev. Fred Small, senior pastor, First Church Unitarian, Littleton, Massachusetts
ALSO BY SUSAN PAGE

How One of You Can Bring the Two of You Together

The Eight Essential Traits of Couples Who Thrive

If I’m So Wonderful, Why Am I Still Single?

The Shortest Distance Between You and a Published Book
Why Talking Is Not Enough

Eight Loving Actions That Will Transform Your Marriage

Susan Page

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For Cathi and Steven
Guadalupe
Tim
and Aurora
who have transformed my life
Introduction

*Slight shifts in imagination have more impact on living than major efforts at change.*
—Thomas Moore

Welcome to a journey of discovery and, most important, to Eight Loving Actions that will improve the quality of both your relationship and your spiritual journey, whether that is inside or outside a specific religion.

Whether you are married or not, these Loving Actions will be useful for you.

- If you are a happy and well-adjusted couple, this book will offer you new language to clarify and inspire the ways you are already loving each other, and some new ideas that are more effective than what you are doing now.

- If you are troubled and having difficulty with each other, even if one or both of you are considering ending your relationship, you’ll find insights that can create permanent change—quickly.

- If you are single, the Eight Loving Actions will help you in any new relationship that might come along and in all the relationships in your life: family, friends, and work.
Chapter One gives you an overview of what I call Spiritual Partnership, which differs in two major ways from conventional ideas about marriage. First, Spiritual Partnership uses Loving Actions instead of communication as the primary tool for resolving conflicts and enhancing love; second, Spiritual Partnership shifts your focus from making changes in your partner or your relationship (over which you have little control) to making changes in yourself (over which you have complete control).

Chapters Two through Nine present Eight Loving Actions, which are a new way of “doing” your relationship. They include such ideas as freeing you from the myth that you have to solve the problems in your relationship before you can be happy. They help you manage negative emotions and move directly toward more pleasure and happiness. They give you a way to balance the giving and taking in your relationship, more than you would ever have thought you could achieve by yourself. These Loving Actions give you the power to make your relationship harmonious and loving, even if all your problems aren’t solved. They offer you explicit ways to be more accepting and compassionate toward your partner and to elicit these attitudes in return. And they do all this without asking you to learn new communication skills.

The chapters in Part Two offer you an optional “program” for putting Loving Actions to work, answer common questions, and provide several practical strategies. Part Three gives an in-depth definition of spiritual, describes the origins of Spiritual Partnership, and puts it in historical context.

*An Invitation to Use the “Experiments” in This Book*

Throughout the book, I offer optional “experiments.” You certainly aren’t required to do them in order to understand and use Spiritual Partnership in your relationship. But the experiments offer you an
opportunity to work with the material you are reading. They will be useful if you are working through this material with your partner or with a friend or as part of a support group. Often they serve as a kind of summary of foregoing material.

If you choose to use this book as a do-it-yourself workshop, the experiments offer you a structured, systematic process for integrating all the material in the book into your life.

I encourage you to use a notebook or journal so that you can keep all your experiments together. Whenever you do an experiment, date it. Part of the value of these experiments is repeating them after several months and comparing your results to earlier versions. In fact, consider not only dating each experiment but also making a few notes about what is going on in your life at the time.

I deliberately use the term experiment because I never intend any particular outcome from any of the exercises I suggest. This aligns closely with my general philosophy of life: if you treat everything you do as an experiment, you will never fail, for your only goal is to gather data, to learn something new. No matter what the outcome of the experiment—even if you found you didn’t want to or couldn’t do it—you will have learned something interesting about yourself. The only requirement is that you do the experiment and then reflect, at least briefly, on what you learned by doing it. You learn, not just by doing something new, but by doing something new and then reviewing what you did and what you learned. Without reflection, any learning is diminished, even lost.

**Step One: Your Relationship Now**

To begin our process together at the beginning, I invite you to start your journal with this experiment, a general assessment of your relationship. If you plan to do any of the experiments as we go along, you will need to do this first one, because future experiments build on it.
EXPERIMENT 1

Assess Your Relationship

1. On the first page of your journal, write a paragraph that is a completion of this sentence: On a scale of 1 to 10, right now in this moment, I rate my relationship ____________ because . . .
(Remember to record the date and a few notes about what is going on in your life right now.)

2. In your journal, draw a line across one page, from left to right, in the middle of the page. Above the line, list the reasons you are happy to be together with your partner, the strengths of your relationship, the qualities you love in your partner and your relationship, and the things that work well. What makes you happy?

   Below the line, list the difficulties, the aspects of your relationship that are not fun, the problems, the challenges, the incompatibilities, the areas in which you could improve—in short, anything that causes friction or unhappiness.

   How much time do you spend above the line, and how much below the line? Write percentage figures over on the right, just above and below the line.

   Give these lists careful attention, as we will make use of them later in the book.
Don’t worry about what number you chose to describe your relationship. Whatever your number, and whatever your level of commitment to your partner, your use of Loving Actions will help you.

The Eight Loving Actions that are the heart of Spiritual Partnership work well if you feel committed to your partner and are fully invested in making your relationship the best it can be. Your devotion to your partner will strengthen your commitment to making the Loving Actions work in your life.

If you are ambivalent about your relationship and not certain of your commitment to it, experimenting with the Loving Actions is an effective way for you to gain more information about yourself and your partner and how you are together. Observing what happens when you use Loving Actions will help you make a decision about whether to move forward with your relationship or to leave it. For the vast majority of couples I have worked with, their use of Loving Actions moves their number up the scale. Even if it is already at 10, it moves up to 10+. If you use these actions sincerely and your number moves down, it could well mean that you are not with your true spiritual partner. This is useful information for you.

My Wish for You

As I explain more thoroughly in Chapter Fifteen, I have developed and honed these Eight Loving Actions over many years of working with couples in workshops and trainings all around the world. I have seen couples make changes that range all the way from subtle shifts to seemingly miraculous transformations. My only regret is that I can’t be with you when you read this, to hear firsthand what happens when you try one of the Loving Actions, to encourage you when you encounter frustrations, and to celebrate with you when you make a change that makes a difference.
I invite you to be in touch with me by e-mail (susan@susanpage.com). I would love to hear how your use of the Loving Actions is affecting your relationship and which new ideas are most useful for you. And I do respond to e-mails.

Remember that the Loving Actions do not require extra time on your part. They are simply a new way of doing what you already do. And the really great part is that they don’t require the cooperation or even the participation of your partner! But they do require commitment and focus. Just know that I am with you in spirit and cheering for you every step of the way.

My very best wishes to you! I hope you find this book as exciting to read as I have found it to write, and that it creates welcome changes in your day-to-day pleasure, your passion, your commitment, and your feelings of love.

Acknowledgments

My first debt of gratitude is to the many couples whose stories I tell in these pages, who were willing to experiment with something different and stay with it until it made a difference. Thank you for so generously staying in touch, for sharing your success with others, and for all those follow-up interviews. Your joy and excitement are what compelled me to write this book.

My gratitude to my editor, Alan Rinzler, is immeasurable. He saw the potential in this project, and his vision and commitment brought it to life.

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My own spiritual partner, Mayer, supports me and my writing every day in more ways than I can enumerate here. He made this book possible, and I adore him!
PART ONE

What Is Spiritual Partnership?
CHAPTER 1

Introducing Spiritual Partnership

Spiritual Partnership is a new model for couples, a different understanding of the purpose of loving relationships and how they work. It does not require that you be religious or part of an organized religion, or that you maintain a spiritual practice. As you will see, spiritual is different from religious. It simply means that you align with “spiritual” values, as we define them here.

Spiritual Partnership expands the possibilities of what you can experience with each other as a couple. No matter what the status of their relationship before they began to practice Spiritual Partnership, many couples who engage in this kind of relationship report greater ease between them; freer, more passionate love; and less focus on areas of conflict. Most important, they experience increased inner strength and personal peace and well-being.

For example, Jan was exasperated because her husband, Terry, was extremely controlling when it came to their money. He complained every time Jan spent money on anything, even essentials. Jan tried every communication skill she could find. She expressed her
own frustration, she suggested possible compromises, she declared ultimatums, she tried to understand what was behind Terry's anxiety. Their fights escalated, and the tension in their household increased.

Then Jan learned the principles of Spiritual Partnership and began using Loving Actions. She stopped trying to solve the problem. She moved directly toward creating a pleasant atmosphere in their family. She found ways to meet the family’s needs without upsetting Terry. She found actions that conveyed to Terry that she had compassion for his anxiety, instead of trying in vain to change it.

Within a week of her changes, Jan felt back in charge of her own life and experienced personal power she had not felt for years. The atmosphere in their house transformed; the tension between the two of them melted away. Terry was still anxious and controlling about money, but Jan had found ways to manage these qualities rather than fighting against them.

The changes Jan made are the ones we will learn thoroughly in this book. First, in this chapter, we will lay the foundation on which the Loving Actions of Spiritual Partnership are built. We will learn:

- The historical context of Spiritual Partnership
- What we mean by “spiritual”
- Why communication has failed so many couples
- Exactly what a “Loving Action” is
- The new way that change happens in Spiritual Partnership
- How to make your relationship a spiritual practice

How Spiritual Partnership Fits Historically

If we were to divide modern relationships into three historical stages, with Stage One being the classic 1950s model of homemaker and breadwinner, the second stage would be our rebellion against the
inadequacies of that model. In Stage Two, we struggled to achieve equality between partners and a broader range of acceptable relationship lifestyles.

In the past forty years, we have focused a great deal of attention on equality and fairness in our relationships, on better communication and conflict resolution techniques. Although not every individual marriage has achieved these ideals, the model of equality and fairness in relationships is widely accepted and practiced.

We are ready now for Stage Three, in which we will build on and incorporate the equality and fairness we achieved in Stage Two and move beyond it. In Stage Three, the emphasis will be on love and spiritual depth.

When my husband taught ceramics, he would draw on the blackboard a figure that looked like an hourglass. The bottom half of the hourglass, he would say, is learning the basics. You follow all the rules carefully to achieve competence at designing, throwing, glazing, and firing a pot. Then he would point to the middle of the hourglass and say, “This is the pinnacle of mediocrity.” Your ceramic pots are competent, but they are not imaginative, individual, magical; they don’t yet transcend the ordinary. However, it is only when you have mastered fundamental skills and achieved this pinnacle of mediocrity that you can burst through to levels beyond that to express your true individual creativity.

In our brief history of relationships, we hover today at the center of the hourglass, the pinnacle of “equal, fair, open relationships with good conflict resolution skills.” These are important values, but if we stop with them, we risk limiting our relationships to the ordinary. Now that human endeavor has advanced to a time in which spiritual consciousness is rising, we understand that love is not limited to passion and good communication alone, but can include a spiritual dimension as well.
It is that spiritual dimension that we will explore in depth in this book, and it is for that reason that I have chosen to call Stage Three couples *Spiritual Partners*.

Spiritual Partnership is *not* simply a bigger and better version of the fair and equal relationships we have valued for years. Spiritual Partnership is qualitatively different. You are about to discover some methods and techniques for resolving differences that I strongly suspect you have never tried before. You will not be invited to sit down with your partner and talk things out. Instead the focus will be on what it means to love and on highly specific ways that you can put your love—love for yourself and love for your partner—into action.

**What Do We Mean by *Spiritual***?

*Spirituality* is a widely used term, and we all know vaguely what we mean by it. I need to be precise about what I mean, however, because my understanding of the term *spirituality* underlies everything in this book.

I offer a comprehensive, in-depth definition of spirituality in Chapter Fourteen, but I don’t want to delay getting us into the practical aspects of Loving Actions by giving the full definition now. So I offer here an abbreviated definition that we can use as we get immediately into the heart of what Spiritual Partnership is and how it can transform your relationship. You can refer to the full definition in Chapter Fourteen whenever you feel a need for it.

First, I believe that spirituality is a natural and universal element of our lives that we choose to move toward or to ignore; that it is possible to be more spiritual, less spiritual, or not spiritual at all. A case can certainly be made that because we are all made up of mind, body, and spirit, everyone has a spiritual dimension, and that it is
not possible to be “nonspiritual.” But I have chosen to use *spiritual* to mean “being aligned with your spirit” or “choosing spiritual values.” You can choose a spiritual approach to your relationship, for example, or a nonspiritual approach. So spirituality is not an automatic part of a relationship but rather a commitment, an act of will.

**EXPERIMENT 2**

**What Is Spirituality?**

Before reading further, you may want to take a few minutes to define spirituality for yourself. In your journal or in a conversation with a friend, answer these questions:

1. What do you mean when you use the term *spiritual*?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person? Explain your answer.

To be spiritual, I submit, is to recognize your connection to the universe and to everyone and everything in it, *and to strive each moment for the thoughts and actions that will increase and not decrease this connection*. Your spiritual journey is your own personal journey

- **From isolation to connection.** We are not separate from one another, but one with the universe and everything in it. Anything that moves you toward connection is spiritual; anything that moves you toward separation or isolation is not spiritual.

- **From your conditioned personality to your authentic self.** Each of us consists of layers of beliefs and behaviors that obscure our pure, authentic self. “Spiritual” means moving toward authenticity, toward who you really are.
• **From fear to love.** Love is a gentle, powerful force, too often overwhelmed by fear, which appears in many disguises. Our spiritual task is to recognize how fear stops us, and to progress through it so that love can move freely in our lives.

• **From sleep to consciousness or awareness.** The only true prison is the one we each create with limited consciousness. To be spiritual is to stay curious about our own areas of blindness, of limited or inaccurate vision, and to be open to new awareness.

• **From control to surrender.** You can’t control the universe; instead, be open and receptive to what it offers.

• **From restlessness to inner peace.** As we become more connected, authentic, loving, aware, and receptive, we will experience deep inner strength and radiant joy.

If a spiritual person is one who is moving toward connection, authenticity, love, consciousness, receptivity, and inner peace, then a spiritual practice, such as your relationship, is any behavior that brings you into increasing alignment with the you who embodies these qualities. In other words, **spirituality is bringing yourself into closer and closer alignment with your highest self.**

**How Spiritual Partnership Is Different**

There are two major ways in which Spiritual Partnership differs from Stage Two relationships.

In Spiritual Partnership,

1. Loving Actions replace communication as the primary tool for problem solving and relationship enrichment.
2. Your focal point shifts from your partner and your relationship to your own spiritual path.

Let us now look in depth at both of these significant differences.

**Difference 1: Loving Actions Replace Communication as the Primary Tool for Problem Solving and Relationship Enrichment**

Stage Two relationships rely on a fundamental principle that we are now ready to rise above: that the skills we use in the marketplace—such as negotiating, bargaining, and reaching agreements—will work in love relationships. They won’t. The purpose of the marketplace is to win, to gain advantage over others. The purpose of love is to love. They are two different universes.

For decades, we have been relying heavily on elaborate rules for sharing feelings, negotiating, and even “fair” fighting. When you have a conflict, what can you do? Find time to sit down and talk it over with each other, argue, negotiate. What else is there? When you want to feel closer, you have an honest conversation. Tell your partner what you need to feel loved. Listen to your mate’s deepest feelings.

I want to be very clear that I am not against communication skills! Couples who know and use them are likely to have a far better relationship than couples who don’t. Knowing that your partner has truly understood and accepted a painful, joyful, or sensitive feeling you have is a deeply moving and bonding experience. Resolving a conflict using excellent communication skills can be joyful rather than painful. In fact, if you are reading this and you don’t know how to use “active listening” or what an “I” statement is, the best primer I know for basic, extremely important communication skills is the
classic book that as far as I know invented those terms: *Parent Effectiveness Training* by Thomas Gordon. Even though the book is written for parents, especially Chapters Two and Six are a superb explanation of fundamental communication skills, which are useful for every relationship in your life! Spiritual Partnership builds on these skills.

But communication can also cause problems, and, because communication skills are a limited tool, relying on them may restrict your potential as a couple. Loving Actions open up whole new frontiers for your relationship.

**Why Talking Is Not Enough**

There are four ways in which communication can be problematic or limiting as a relationship-enhancing tool:

1. Your partner may be unavailable, unwilling, or even unable to talk. If the two of you are depending entirely on communication and have no other tools available to you, when your partner simply won’t talk or listen, you may feel stuck, maybe even utterly frustrated, with nowhere else to turn.

2. In many couples, one partner is better at communicating than the other. So when you use communication, you are relying on a skill that puts you on an unequal playing field from the very start, puts one of you at an automatic disadvantage, and creates frustration for the other. Relying only on communication will exacerbate this problem, not solve it. It will be like trying to remove your finger from one of those woven finger traps by pulling harder and harder and only trapping yourself worse.

3. A third problem with relying exclusively on communication to solve problems and create closeness is that communication skills
are high-level, difficult skills that most people have not even begun to master. Effective communication does not come naturally to most people. In fact, what we seem to be born with instead is a natural tendency to use poor communication:

- To become defensive when attacked
- To offer an immediate solution when someone cries or complains
- To blame the other guy when there is a problem instead looking at our own role
- To gloss over feelings instead of acknowledging them
- To ask indirectly for what we want
- To criticize others more often than we affirm them

All these extremely ineffective communication patterns are ubiquitous. Unlearning them and replacing them with effective skills is work that most people never have the opportunity or interest to do.

When communication is done badly, it exacerbates the original problem, creating more confusion, frustration, and anger than ever. Poor communication doesn’t solve problems; it creates them!

4. The really giant problem with communication is the hidden agenda it so often brings with it. When two people sit down to communicate about a problem, what they are really trying to do is get the other person to see things their way, and to change.

Trying to solve a problem by getting your partner to change is by far the most common problem-solving approach there is. Yet it is the worst possible method! It is neither effective nor spiritual because (1) it never works and (2) it does not honor your partner. As we shall see, Loving Actions do work, and they do honor your partner.
As we said, *good* communication between two people who love each other and who treat each other in a spiritually mature way is a valuable tool and a great pleasure. One major difference between Stage Two relationships and Spiritual Partnership is this: *in Spiritual Partnership, good communication is a goal you strive for, not the means you use to get there.* Good communication flows naturally when you have become Spiritual Partners through the use of Loving Actions. As we shall see in detail in Chapter Twelve, good communication is the natural *result* of a highly evolved, thriving intimate relationship.

**Loving Actions**

If we are going to replace the old tool of communication with a new approach, let’s find out more about it. What are Loving Actions?

A Loving Action is an intentional behavior that

- Is motivated by a desire for spiritual growth
- Is unilateral
- Requires discipline, an act of will
- Is experimental

The good news is that deciding to use a Loving Action does not require you to change the way you feel. You can’t order your feelings or emotions around anyway. All you have to do as a Spiritual Partner is decide to try an experiment, even if you don’t feel like it, to try a new action or behavior. Hoping that your feelings will change or waiting until you feel like changing your behavior is only a way of digging yourself deeper into your unpleasant feelings. But changing your behavior as an experiment, even when you don’t feel like it, can definitely lead to a change in your feelings. In other words, you will never feel your way into new actions, but you can act your way into new feelings.
We can best understand each of the four characteristics of a Loving Action by looking at an example.

Lyle had gone to great lengths to plan a surprise for his wife, Wendy. An old friend of hers, Deb, was coming to town. Lyle arranged for Wendy to meet him at a restaurant at six o’clock, where Deb would also be waiting.

At a quarter to six, Wendy called Lyle on his cell phone to tell him she wouldn’t be able to make it.

Working late, usually unexpectedly, was a pattern of Wendy’s that caused a lot of friction between the two of them. In the past, Lyle’s pattern was to get a righteous tone in his voice and to lecture Wendy about how inconsiderate she was and how this just couldn’t continue. He kept looking for ways to convince her that she was being selfish, that he too had legitimate needs, and his frustration would escalate, because he felt there was nothing he could do to make Wendy change her ways.

Wendy loathed the way Lyle became paternalistic with her, and she felt misunderstood and unsupported. She couldn’t help these work crises, her work was important, and she contributed a lot of income to the family. She needed some slack.

But Lyle had recently begun attending a Spiritual Partnership group, so he decided to experiment with Loving Action 3, act as if, which we will learn in Chapter Four. Lyle was upset, but he deliberately acted as if he were loving and understanding, as an experiment. He asked Wendy, in an interested way, what was going on at work. While she was talking, he had a chance to pull his thoughts together; he realized that the surprise would be just as much fun if he and Deb waited until Wendy came home later. Then Lyle wished Wendy good luck with her project, said “I love you,” and told her he’d see her later.

Lyle and Deb had a lovely time getting to know each other better, and later at home, they all had a wonderful time with the surprise.