



## Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter - Issue #14

Everything about relationships! Be kind, don't panic, and have faith.



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### Welcome to Issue #14!

If you want to catch up on earlier issues, you can find the archive [here](#).

**It's less than a week to Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.** For Jews, this is a time of introspection, a time to heal bruised or fractured relationships, a time to reflect on ways we've missed the mark and ways we can resolve to do better in the coming year.

And for those of us active in synagogue music, it's crazy busy! I'm directing the choir this year at our synagogue ([Temple Sinai in South Burlington, Vermont](#)), and as I write this I'm preparing for our last rehearsal later today, involving a cast of (seemingly) thousands. (Well, a couple dozen, anyway).

This time of the Jewish year is what couples therapy is all about: healing, forgiveness, returning to our best selves. Whether you're Jewish or not, setting aside time to reflect, individually and collectively, on how we act in the world is a good thing to do.

**More on The Magic Key that Solves All Relationship Problems**

You might recall from [Newsletter #13](#) that I proposed that the magic key that solves all relationship problems is (drumroll, please)...

...the ability to be mildly annoyed.

And I presented some reasons why I think that assertion--overstated though it may be--has a lot of truth to it.

Well, one of you subscribers responded. Here's what she wrote--we'll call her Lily:

In a recent fight, my husband has told me that all our problems are my parents' fault. He explains: They are emotionally difficult, chaotic and hurtful to me, so I turn to him for comfort or healing or listening to me emote about it, and this is more than he can take. Then I'm angry that he won't offer me comfort and within minutes it's WW3. His solution? I should get therapy to deal with them. He should not be involved whatsoever, in any therapy or with them. We've been married 20 years, with two children.

To your advice in your newsletter this week, that it's ok that our partners—and others we love—annoy us: yes. But what's.... What's beyond annoyance, difference? What do we choose to be in relationship with... we're always choosing, that's part of what you're saying, but at what point... what are acceptable levels, in fact HEALTHY, levels of annoyance and what are... destructive, poisonous levels?

Lily's thoughtful comments and question led Judy and me to do [an episode of our "Couples Therapy in Seven Words" podcast](#) devoted to what she said.

I won't try to summarize what we said--just check out the episode! What I want to share now is Lily's response to the podcast. She wrote:

Hi Bruce and Judy--

I was finally able to watch this episode of CTin7 last night, actually with my husband. It was engaging and gave us a lot to think about together; I'm going to be watching it a second time for sure, and soon.

I particularly liked the idea of thin and thick narratives-- we had been talking about our narrative/ our story/ and how we tell and create it-- this concept is an extremely insightful expansion (or maybe not expansion but modification-- a different, more apt version) of that concept.

It was also just really intense to hear you both discuss my very personal and specific question, intense and extremely helpful. Thank you-- so much-- for that. It was the first third person viewpoint we've ever heard together. Actually-- I think it was pretty awesome that we were on the outside listening in, and couldn't engage with you. Engaging we would have (1) gotten distracted and not been able to take in as wholly the things you were saying and (2) we would have diverted you down different paths. Not that I'm saying there wouldn't have been advantages to being in person and being able to ask questions or be personally challenged! But there was something... really powerful about being forced to just listen and follow where you both went with the question/issue. We could pause and discuss, and we can re-listen. But the separation meant we had the privilege of just taking it in.

Thank you, deeply, once again.

Lily, thank you!

I especially want to comment on what you said about your and your husband's experience of hearing the episode, as opposed to being there with us and participating.

Many years ago I was trained in a therapeutic modality called "Reflecting Team." In a Reflecting Team session, a couple (or family or individual) would be interviewed by a therapist in a room with a one-way mirror, with a team of professionals observing from the next room. After a while, everyone would switch rooms, so that the couple and therapist could observe the team reflecting on what they saw and heard.

It's not a very popular modality, if for no other reason than it's pretty much practical only in training settings. (Think about the sheer cost of having at least two professionals involved in every session.)

But when the reflecting team approach worked well--and it did sometimes--it provided just the sort of experience that Lily and her husband had. To observe people offering their reflections on your situation, without having to react or respond, can be powerful. Of course, to be helpful, the reflections have to come from a place of genuine respect and compassion.

Although I don't have (and don't want) a one-way mirror setup, I have applied some of the ideas I learned in that training to how I work now. For example, I'll often invite one of the people in a couple to speculate, in the spirit of curiosity, about how the other might be understanding a particular situation, with the idea that the other person is just taking it in without needing to comment.

Again, thank you, Lily, for inviting us to reflect on your questions.

Do you have comments or questions you'd like us to reflect on?

Send me a message!



## News & Schmooze

**A word from our sponsor:** Our sponsor for this newsletter is Laria Zylber, an author Judy (that's Judy Alexander, my wife and podcast co-host) and I know. Laria's book, *The Blue Tent: Erotic Tales from the Bible*, is available in paperback, eBook, and audiobook versions--just go to her website, <https://lariazylber.com>.

You can now see interviews with Laria on her website--she's started a [blog](#). In the interviews she talks about the idea of sexual midrash, why it's not at all disrespectful of the biblical narrative, and a lot more.

And you get to see what Laria looks like! Which might explain a lot about our relationship to her.

Tell your friends! And if you liked the book, please give it a rating and review on [its Amazon page](#). Thanks!



**Upcoming presentations:** I'm delighted to announce that Judy and I will be presenting "Jewish Perspectives on Sex: Sacred Sex and Sexual Midrash" at two locations in Vermont and one in Florida in the upcoming months. The Vermont times are set, and the Florida time (in Ormond Beach in late February) is awaiting confirmation.

More information is at [this page](#).

**Podcast news:** Here are some of the topics and guests Judy and I have covered on our "Couples Therapy in Seven Words" podcast since my last newsletter:

[Commitment, Aging, and Spirituality: An Interview with Caryl and Jay Casbo](#)

[When Do Annoyances Become Deal-Breakers?](#) (This is the one I talked about above.)

[Helping Women Who Have Experienced Violence: An Interview with Rev. Cheryl Kincaid](#)

[Relationships and Parenting with Neurodiversity: An Interview with Dr. Christopher Scott Wyatt](#)

[Healing from Infidelity through Kundalini Yoga: An Interview with Eva G. Kane](#)

As always, if you have ideas for guests (including yourself) or topics you'd like us to include, [drop me a line](#).

That's all for now—bye!

--Bruce

Send me a message!

**P.S.** If someone forwarded you this message, and you'd like to subscribe yourself, [go to my website](#) and watch the magic box appear that says "Click here to sign up for Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter!" I'd love to welcome you on board!

Please take a moment to make sure these emails actually make it into your inbox! The easiest way (at least for those of us in Google-land) is just to add me to your contacts.

[Here's a link](#) that tells you how to do it for various email services. Please let me in--it's lonely in the Spam or Promotions folder!

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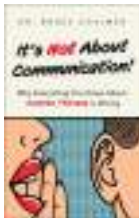
### Podcast

Couples Therapy in Seven Words



### Website

Dr. Chalmer's website:  
Books, couples therapy practice, blog



### It's Not About Communication!

Why Everything You Know About Couples Therapy is Wrong



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