CHAPTER 6

The Language of Ecstasy

Thus far I have spoken about numerous possible impediments to ecstasy and ways to avoid, prevent, or transform these obstacles. As many of us have learned through experience, whether we fly high—or crash and burn—in the pursuit of our ecstatic endeavors is largely dependent on the effectiveness of our communication.

Communication is a basic human need and a fundamental social process. However—as with sex—different people communicate differently.

Just as with sex, how to communicate, when to do it, how often to do it, how deeply to do it, with whom to do it, and with what expectation—is all open for discovery and discussion.

At best, the words “communicate” and “communication” are an umbrella term for a vast array of methods by which human beings and other life forms attempt to relate to each other. At worst, these two words have become so generalized, unspecific, and overused that they have almost been drained of meaning. Attached modifiers, such as “open” and “honest” are equally vague. For example, which of the many definitions of the word “open” might apply to communication? And if the communication were not open, to whom would it be closed? The
word “honest” is not much more helpful. Do we really want blunt honesty in all our speaking? Wouldn’t that create at least as many problems as it might solve?

I know I am not the only one for whom phrases such as “open, honest communication” elicits a “get me out of here” response second only to that of the dreaded “We need to talk…” In order for our communication to support us in our quest for ecstatic experience, we need to become more deliberate and more precise in our language, and we need to approach communication of all types—including nonverbal—with conscious intention.

This chapter contains two parts. In the first part you’ll become more aware of how you communicate now. You’ll learn creative uses of language—verbal and nonverbal—and discover how to communicate effectively with someone whose style of speaking is different from yours. You will discover effective ways to ask for what you want and learn how to speak up when something isn’t working for you. You’ll also get to practice the art of listening more deeply. In the second part of the chapter, you’ll learn how to use language to create fulfilling erotic and ecstatic connections and encounters.

**Speaking with Conscious Intention**

In Chapter 2, I asked you: *Why do you do sex—what do you get out of it? What’s the delight?* Let’s ask the same questions about communication: *Why do you communicate?*
Here are a few examples, just to get you thinking:

- To amuse, delight, or entertain
- To change someone’s mind or to convince them of something
- To comfort/soothe or to ask for comfort/soothing
- To excite or enthuse
- To explain or to ask for explanation
- To get someone to behave differently

- To give or to get love
- To be heard and understood
- To make friends
- To name something, to differentiate one thing from another
- To negotiate, to reach an agreement
- To be noticed
- To turn someone on or to seduce them
- And—as my friend Eric Wunderman reminded me—to get
the salt from one end of the dinner table to the other

There is nothing inherently wrong with any communication intention—with, of course, the exceptions of intentions to bully, intimidate, and harm. Short of that, there is nothing wrong in trying to persuade someone to see things our way. Is it inappropriate, for instance, to try to convince a recovering addict to take the medicinal dose of morphine that will help save their life? Or to speak with the intention of turning someone on? Too often, however, we are unaware of our intention when we are speaking. We try to convince someone of something "for their own good," when in fact, our actual intention is to get them to do something for our own good.

When everyone agrees, or mostly agrees, with each other, it is easy to hold a positive intention for a conversation. Whenever we feel fear—whatever its specific nature—our positive intentions can quickly fly out the window. Speaking from personal experience, I can recall countless conversations in which my sole intention was to get out of the room as quickly as possible. This is hardly an intention likely to lead to an ecstatic conclusion.

When a conversation triggers our fight-or-flight response, our intentions are reduced to "I've gotta win this!" or "Goddess, please let me survive this." Either of these is a good indication that the intention we held when we entered the conversation was probably not clear enough or
positive enough. Perhaps we were thinking, *I have the perfect argument to make them see that I am right,* or *I’ve worked out just the right way to tell them that I don’t want to do what they want me to do—without getting them mad at me.*

In situations where we know in advance that we are facing a potentially difficult conversation with one or more people, it pays to set an intention that includes a desire for an outcome that is for everyone’s highest good. There is nothing wrong with focusing on an outcome you hope to achieve. But, instead of speaking solely with the intention of convincing someone to do something differently, what if we were to approach the conversation...

...with a sense of curiosity? What if our intention was to discover something new about the speaker?

...assuming that the person to whom we were speaking wished us enormous quantities of joy, pleasure, and happiness?

...with the intention of reducing shame and feelings of unworthiness in ourselves and others?

How would that change our verbal language? Or body language? Our listening? The outcome of the conversation?

Recall a conversation that you recently had or imagine one that you’re about to have. What is/was your initial intention
for the conversation? What higher intention would be/would have been a good companion to your original intention?

There are many good resources on effective and compassionate communication, and I’ll talk about some of them later. Before we discuss any of the how-to’s, let’s prioritize the setting of clear intentions. Let’s practice making space alongside our initial intention—whether it’s to convince, amuse, or seduce—to include a higher intention. If you find it difficult to think of a specific higher intention you can always use this affirmation: “May the outcome of this conversation be for the highest good and greatest happiness of all concerned.”

Say It in Plain Language

We humans have been inventing new languages from the moment we learned to speak. As we migrated into new territories and met other humans, our languages adapted, expanded, and combined until today, there are somewhere between 3,000 and 10,000 living languages. According to Ethnologue (www.ethnologue.org), 6,909 is thought to be the likely number. This does not include the many dialects spoken within these languages. Nor does this include the numerous jargon and slang sub-languages spoken in each tongue.
You’ve probably seen a version of this skit countless times: A patient asks a doctor for a diagnosis. The doctor rattles off a completely incomprehensible two minutes of Latin/medical mumbo-jumbo. When the doctor finally stops talking, the patient asks, “Hey, doc, can you say that in English?” The doctor replies, “You have the flu.” It’s an old joke. But let’s look at it a new way. Let’s look at the intention of each of the speakers.

The patient’s intention was to get information about their health. Were they going to die from this ailment, they wondered? Could they get back to work next week? The doctor’s intention might have been to give the patient complete and precise information. The doctor’s intention could also have been to impress the patient by sounding as authoritative as possible. In any event, no one’s intention could be fulfilled until both parties were speaking and hearing the same language.

Every social group, religion, school, and profession has its own jargon—a particular subset of the native language. In many cases this includes a unique style of speaking—a rhythm, a cadence, or a rhyme, for example—as well as the use of specific words. As long as everyone in the conversation speaks the language, all is well. If, for example, New Age people are sharing in healing circles while corporate people are negotiating in meeting rooms, everyone has a fairly good chance of being understood. However, imagine the scene if they were all to sit down in one room and try to communicate
using only their tribal languages.

Here's a short list of some of these specialized sub-languages: Medical speak, tech talk, corporate speak, therapy speak, religious speak (all denominations), New Age speak, art (including theatre, dance, music, etc.) speak, academic speak, 12-step speak, yoga speak, legalese, finance speak, political speak, Internet and texting speak, Star Trek speak, and twin speak—that secret language only understood between a pair of twins. Then of course there’s slang, as in hip-hop slang, beatnik slang, hippie slang, cockney rhyming slang, and more.

“languages” you speak. How many of these do you think are easily understood by... Your lover? Your family? Your best friend? Your co-workers? Think of at least one instance where you were left feeling baffled, angry, or excluded when someone used their “language” and you had no idea what was being said.

One function of jargon is to intentionally distinguish members of a group from non-members. This gives the members a sense of solidarity and empowerment. But often things go too far and even the initiated don’t understand what is being said. My friend Ingrid
Geronimo offers a great example:

If you go from one corporate job to another, you ultimately wind up with a language gap—you have to learn a whole new set of acronyms or nomenclature. This can cause you to feel like you’re so far behind the game that you question whether you really know what you thought you knew when you got hired. On top of all this, everyone assumes you know what they’re talking about because you’re in the same industry.

Joining a group with a new tribal language can be exciting. We all want to be better understood and to feel that we belong, and this new language appears to be authentic and effective at communicating the values, needs, and desires of the group. When the language is new and fresh to us, we speak our new sub-language with intention and precision. However, over time, our new language can grow stale and may dissolve into platitudes, catchphrases, and obscure references.

One common feature of tribal speak is the use of three or four or five words—or three-or four-or five-syllable words—where one or two words would suffice. Initially our intentions are good. More words, bigger words, or made-up words appear to make our speaking more precise, but as Lubyanka observed in her blog at ladylubyanka.wordpress.com:
My experience of flouncey communication is that it tends to be an indirect, unhelpful, inflammatory, unresponsive, and obscure way to express something like “I’m unhappy with that and would rather it were like this.”

Tribal speech, especially when used outside of the tribe, is usually an indirect way of speaking. For example, if you’re apprehensive about saying to your partner “I hated that sex party and I never want to go near anything like it again,” you might borrow language from your healing and meditation group and say, “I found the energy a bit negative and I did not feel much of a heart connection with anyone there.” Your partner, hearing this, may not be angry with you, but they also probably have no clue that you never want to go to a party like that again. They might logically assume that on some future evening the energy will be more positive, the crowd friendlier, and you’ll likely meet new people with whom you’ll feel more of a connection. The whole situation you’re trying to avoid is likely to arise again sometime soon.

The use of carefully worded tribal speak is also a great way to avoid answering a direct question. Let’s imagine that someone you don’t much like asks if you would like to have a relationship with them. Your inner voice is loudly screaming “No! I would rather stick needles in my eyes!” However, the polite, placating part of you answers with a long, fluffy
Whether your intention is to convey an idea, a feeling, or a plea, the language you choose to deliver your message will determine how accurately and easily your message is received.

Recall a time in which you assumed that someone understood you, only to find out later that they had completely missed or misunderstood what you were trying to say. Recall a time when you did not ask for clarification when you needed it.
Language Is More than Words

Growing up in the theatre, I quickly learned that the playwright’s words were only a starting point in the exchange between the actors and the audience. Arthur Laurents—the author of the books of musicals such as *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*—said it well: “plays are emotions”—not simply words strung together. As a theatre artist, it was my job to make all the other languages of theatre—acting, directing, scenery lighting, costumes, sound, music, and dancing—align with, support, and illuminate the playwright’s message. I learned that no matter how clear and profound the words, if they were spoken with the inappropriate intent, or surrounded by shoddy production values, the audience would not hear the message. Often when things were feeling stale or inauthentic in rehearsal, we would put down the script and play a scene without words. We might mime or dance or gesticulate—whatever it took to communicate our character’s message to other characters and to the audience.

Like plays, *relationships are emotions.* Sometimes no matter how hard we try, and no matter how understanding our partner(s) might be, we simply can’t put what we feel into words. This is when we need to remember that language and communication take many forms. If you can’t describe what you feel, try drawing the feeling. Pick up some crayons and a blank piece of paper and let your hand move across the page. You don’t have to draw anything...
representational—you can just draw an abstract expression of your feelings. In the event that you find yourself in tears, or feel so angry that you break your crayons, just breathe and keep drawing. When you finish the first drawing, start a second. Let this new drawing represent the way you would like to feel.

When you finish your drawings, if you feel that the drawings effectively communicate your feelings—or that they might provide a starting place for that communication—you can share them with your partner. Or, you can take a break—walk around the block or have a cup of tea in the garden. Notice if you feel clearer and more able to identify your feelings. If so, you can try putting those feelings into words in your journal. Often our intentions become clearer when we write before we speak. When you feel that your words match your feelings, you can then share them with your friend or partner.

You can also dance or sing your way into your feelings. Turn on some music, close your eyes, and let loose. As was the case with your drawings, you do not have to share your song or dance with the person you’re trying to communicate with, but you can if you think it will help.

There are many other forms of communication, which are either nonverbal, or that place words secondary to action. Dr. Gary Chapman, a marriage counselor and author of The Five Love Languages, observed that everyone he counseled had a “love language.” These love languages were distinct preferences
in the way people expressed their love and preferred to receive love from others.

The five love languages are:

1. *Words of Affirmation*: If this is your love language, you want to hear how much someone loves you and why. Unsolicited compliments from someone you love mean the world to you.

2. *Quality Time*: If this is your love language, you feel loved when you have your lover’s full, undivided attention.

3. *Receiving Gifts*: If this is your love language, you appreciate the love and effort behind thoughtful, meaningful gifts.

4. *Acts of Service*: If this is your love language, you feel loved and appreciated when your lover says, “Let me do that for you.”

5. *Physical Touch*: If this is your love language, you feel loved when someone is physically present and accessible, and shows their love with hugs, holding hands, thoughtful touches, etc. It is not limited to sexual or sensual touch.

Love languages are just one way of expressing the different ways in which we prefer to give and
receive love and affection. Another way of expressing these differences is with the sensory preferences model used in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, or NLP. We each have a sense through which we prefer to take in and process the information we receive from the world around us. Some people get their information through pictures and images, others through sounds. Still others perceive chiefly through physical sensations. The preference we use when we process information—be it sight, sound, touch, smell, or taste—is likely to be our preference in sensual and erotic relating as well.

When we learn to speak each other’s preferred language of love, our loved ones receive the message of love in the way that they can most easily understand and appreciate it.

Relationships may improve dramatically with just this single awareness.

Learning to speak any of the various languages of love does not have to be difficult or time-consuming. It’s easy and works like this: Ignore the Golden Rule. Do not do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Instead, follow the Platinum Rule: Do unto others the way they would have you do unto them.

The Language of Breath

I loved the National Theatre of Great Britain’s
production of *War Horse*. It is a story of World War I told through the eyes of a horse named Joey, who was sent to the front at the beginning of the war. Joey is played by an intricate life-size puppet made of wood, wires, and translucent brown fabric. As a fully-grown horse, Joey is animated by three puppeteers: two stand inside his body, and the puppeteer who animates his head stands outside. When we first see Joey in the opening scene of the play, he is a young foal. Because this puppet is so small, the three puppeteers must stand alongside him to animate him. Our first impression is of a puppet and three puppeteers. Nonetheless, we empathize with this young foal taking his first steps. How? When Joey first enters, he frolics downstage, looks at us, and holds perfectly still.

The only movement and sound is of his breathing. Nothing else. Just breath. We instinctively begin to breathe along with him. By the second or third breath, we are already empathizing with Joey. The breath creates our bond with him—the three puppeteers seem to vanish. This conversation with breath is used consistently throughout the nearly three-hour-long play. Whenever the puppeteers want to express an emotion they say it first with breath, then support it with other appropriate equine body language.

It works exactly the same way with people and in real life. We can “hear” each other through our breath. We can understand one another’s feelings through our breath. We may intuit someone’s motivation for their actions through
their breath. When we breathe with someone, we have a visceral sense of the way they are feeling.

**Conscious Naming**

When we name something, we use language to differentiate it from something else. When we release an old name and take on a new one, we make a conscious shift into a new identity. It's like opening your journal and writing a title on the top of an empty page. This title will have a substantial influence over the nature and content of what follows on that page. It is much the same way when you name a person or a relationship. When you call yourself *married* as opposed to *single*, for example, the change in the name of the relationship changes that relationship. The change is even deeper if you choose to take your partner's last name, or to combine your last names. When we change our name or the name of our relationship, we are communicating to the outside world that we have a new identity.

Relationships and relationship names can be far more varied and creative than the commonly used *single, married, boyfriend, girlfriend, husband*, and *wife*. I asked a random sampling of people at a yearly conference I attend to tell me the names that they used to refer to a significant other. These are not pet names. These are names that real, live people use to identify their relationship or their significant other. Here are just some of their answers:
These are actual identities. Boggles the mind, doesn’t it? Since all these names represent different identities, it follows that all these relationships are unique. Each of these relationships was named to honor the essence of the specific connection between two or more people in the relationship. Conversely, each relationship has developed along a certain path because of its name.

One reason to consciously name relationships is to differentiate one relationship from another. Some of the people who shared with me their names for relationships are non-monogamous. They wanted a separate name for each of several partners and relationships. In other cases, some monogamous people had divorced a husband or
a wife and now preferred to name and create some other kind of erotic partnering.

Another reason to consciously name is to allow us to circumvent negative associations we may have to commonly used words. For example, words such as marriage, family, and community are generally thought to be words that describe positive, loving institutions. However, if your family of origin kicked you out of the house for being gay, or you recently went through an expensive, acrimonious divorce, or if your political or sexual leanings have made you a pariah in your community, you may not feel all warm and fuzzy when you hear the words family, marriage, or community. It’s a good idea to find out how the person you’re talking to feels about a certain word or term before assuming that its consistent use will be welcomed and appreciated.

Differences in the naming of relations and relationships illustrate and reflect other values and preferences as well. Some people feel safe and cared for when there is a strong tangible connection between all the members of a particular network—be that professional, social, familial, or erotic. Other people feel safe and respected when strong boundaries and explicit agreements are in place. Unsurprisingly, these different types of folks use different names for similar relationships. For example, I have a friend who has referred to the man her mother married after divorcing her father as stepfather from the day their engagement was announced. Another friend has referred to her mother’s
second husband as *my mother's husband* for more than 20 years.

Gender is becoming increasingly more fluid. People of blended or indeterminate gender can be found in ever-increasing numbers all over the world. If you are not sure of someone's gender, it is perfectly proper to politely ask, "Excuse me, which pronoun do you prefer?" or "What's your pronoun of choice?" If you're not comfortable asking either of these, simply avoid pronouns altogether and simply refer to them by their name. "They" is once again becoming increasingly accepted as a third-person singular, gender-free pronoun.

Let me be clear. I am not implying that you are expected to read everyone's mind and take into account every possible linguistic sensitivity anyone might have. That would be taking political correctness to an excruciating extreme. Rather, it is up to each of us to speak up if someone is using a word to describe us or our relationships that annoys, angers, hurts, or offends us—or is simply not quite the right fit. If we want others to follow the Platinum Rule, it's our responsibility to tell them what we want, and to do so as soon as we can. Postponing a correction can lead to serious and painful misunderstandings down the road.

**Different Styles of Communication**

Humans communicate in a variety of styles. Many of the styles in which people communicate result in easy, delightful, amusing,
and erotic conversations. But we also communicate with the intention of getting what we want and in the hopes of getting something to change. It is in these situations when we are most likely to feel the effects of our different styles of communication.

People approach negotiation and/or conflict resolution—both personal and professional—in different ways. Our unique style of communication is not simply a preference—it’s more like a default, or a template. We use our preferred communication style unconsciously. There is nothing inherently wrong with any style of communication. The confusion arises when our style either doesn’t match or is not compatible with the style of the person with whom we’re talking.

When we become more conscious of our default style of communication and learn to recognize the default style of the people we are communicating with, we can expand and adapt our speaking and our listening. Our style of communication even offers clues as to what we need as part of any agreement.

Communication styles are not arbitrary or accidental. They are all based upon the speaker's genuine needs. Each person needs something out of an exchange in order for a negotiation process to feel successful and complete. Whether it's a profit, a good feeling, or the certainty that the right thing was done, if each speaker’s needs are not met, the conversation will probably not lead to a lasting agreement.
Let's take a look at some common styles of communication to see how style and need inform each other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Style</th>
<th>Key Phrase</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal or business</td>
<td>Let's make a deal.</td>
<td>These people want to come to an agreement by which everyone can abide. They need to make a deal in which they can be reasonably assured of realizing some sort of return on their investment of time, love, money, etc.</td>
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<p>| Mechanical or scientific | Let's figure out how this will work. | These people need to understand the mechanics of the situation. They like to break things down into their individual component parts, observe how those parts function individually and as a unit, then put them back together in some workable way. |
| Therapeutic or psychological | Let’s heal this. | These people want to analyze the situation for the purpose of healing the wound. They are concerned with feelings and emotions. They are less concerned with whether a solution is profitable or workable, than whether everyone feels good about it. |
| Academic or theoretical | Let’s think this through. | These people want to know how this situation could be informed by hypothetical and theoretical thinking. They want to examine all the data and test a law or theorem. They need step-by-step proof based on established knowledge and theories. |
| Military or hierarchical | Let’s fight it out. | These people need a clear win. Right and wrong is important to them. They are willing to fight long and hard for what they believe. |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Medical or surgical</th>
<th>Let's find a cure.</th>
<th>These people need to solve the problem by finding something that will alleviate the symptoms or eliminate the cause and thereby stop the problem from hurting or spreading.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artistic or entertaining</td>
<td>Let's imagine.</td>
<td>These people want to use their creativity. They need to see the situation in a new light and try something different. They are likely to ask, “How can we make this the most fun?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial</td>
<td>Let's obey the law.</td>
<td>These people need to find a just solution based upon the law, customs, or rules of a community or tribe. Their primary concern is whether a solution is fair and equitable according to those laws, customs, or rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anarchistic</td>
<td>Let's smash the system.</td>
<td>These people are interested in ignoring or breaking the rules that restrict them and need to see just how far outside the lines they can color.</td>
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As you can see, no matter which of the above styles people prefer, they each require a particular need to be met in the course of discussion or negotiation in order to feel satisfied. A person who needs to find a just and fair solution which satisfies the rules of a certain organization or community would have a hard time getting that need met when negotiating with an anarchist who needs to find a solution that flaunts those same laws. An academic who needs proof based on established knowledge and theories might find it challenging to get what they need while trying to satisfy an artist who needs an innovative, entertaining solution.

The practice of Radical Acceptance can build a bridge over stylistic gaps. When we accept that a situation is the way it is without expectation that the essential facts will change, it is easier to focus on the needs behind the styles of communication.

For example:

**The situation:** Pamela and her partner, Casey, have been in a monogamous relationship for five years. Recently, Pamela has wanted to explore her submissive side and has been longing to find a dominant play partner, as
Casey is not interested in dominating Pamela or anyone else. Pamela met Alexis, a potential play partner, online and has had a coffee date with Alexis (with Casey’s knowledge). Pamela would now like to schedule a play date with her new friend.

What’s not going to change—or at least not anytime soon: Casey is not interested in exploring domination. Pamela’s interest in exploring her submissive side is not going to go away.

The communication styles involved: Pamela’s communication style is therapeutic/psychological. Whatever the outcome, Pamela needs to know that everyone feels good about it. Casey’s style is legal/business. Casey wants to come to an agreement by which everyone can profit. Can these needs be met? Yes! Casey has no problem with Pamela exploring submission with Alexis so long as everyone agrees to a few rules: Pamela can play with Alexis no more than once every two weeks. There must be no kissing and no genital sex. In exchange, Casey wants to spend one afternoon or evening a week with Pamela with no agenda or outside distractions. Casey’s love language is quality time, so the “profit” Casey realizes from this arrangement is uninterrupted time with Pamela.

Pamela can agree to these conditions, but only if she knows that Casey truly feels okay about opening up their relationship to accommodate her new interest. Casey assures her, not only verbally, but also by speaking
Pamela’s love language, touch: Casey holds her hand and hugs her close. Any discussion of a sensitive issue such as opening up a relationship could turn into a painful, potentially relationship-ending, screaming match. But by practicing Radical Acceptance and being aware of—and sensitive to—the needs behind our different styles of communication, we can bring new levels of consciousness into our negotiations.

Most of us have one or more secondary styles of communication in addition to our primary style. For example, a person with a medical/surgical style who wants to find a cure that will eliminate the problem might also prefer the solution to be new and creative. A person with an academic/theoretical style, who wants proof based on established theories, might also care that everyone involved feels good about the solution. When our primary styles are not compatible, we can often find common ground by consciously negotiating from a secondary style.

All of us shift communication styles when speaking with different people in different contexts. For example, the default style of a man trying to pick up a woman for sex might be business, or “Let’s make a deal.” He may offer an expensive dinner and a night on the town in exchange for sex. If this same man were trying to get assistance in a car repair shop, his default communication style might be medical (“Let’s find a cure.”) or mechanical (“Let’s figure out why this isn’t working and how it can.”).
The purpose of acknowledging our different styles and preferences in communication is not to categorize people or place limitations on them. It is to help us to become more able to focus on the issue itself and on meeting the needs of everyone involved.

**Negotiating to Create Ecstatic Experiences**

Now it’s time to look at how to use language to create ecstatic events and relationships. Negotiation may seem like an odd word to use in an ecstatic or erotic context. But in fact, all negotiation really means is a discussion set up to produce an agreement. Whether the agreement you wish to reach is a multinational business deal or about the particulars of the hot date you and your partner are planning for this coming weekend, you’ll need to have a discussion in order to reach an agreement. In an ecstatic context, negotiation is simply a form of mindfulness and conscious communication.

Negotiating can be done in a variety of styles and on virtually any topic. Whether the negotiation is to co-create an ecstatic experience or to solve a problem that has become an impediment to ecstasy, the basics of mindful and effective negotiation are the same. Here are some key steps:

**Get the other person’s perspective.** What are their concerns? What do they need from you? What is their greatest need or desire
in the eventual outcome?

Tell them what you need. Let the other person know what you need and why you need it. You may have different opinions about the best way to arrive at an ecstatic conclusion, but not about the overall ecstatic intention.

Think about some options beforehand. Many creative solutions are based on a joint modification of an idea that someone brings to the table. However, it’s important not to become overly attached to your ideas. Anticipate why the other person might not agree with you and be prepared to offer alternatives.

Focus on solutions. Negotiation is not a debate. When we negotiate in order to solve a problem, our intention is to find a solution, not to place blame or be right. Don’t try to prove the other person wrong. It’s a waste of time and will only lead to an argument. If you find yourself overly attached to your point of view, ask yourself, “Would I rather be right, or would I rather be happy?” Keep your attention on the intention: to find a potentially ecstatic solution.

Negotiate at the right time. If either party is highly emotional, preoccupied with something else, stressed out, or exhausted, you are unlikely to reach any workable agreement.

Negotiate at the Resilient Edge of Resistance. Do not push someone beyond their emotional, physical, financial—or any
other—resilient edge. Don’t let yourself be pushed beyond your edge. Check in with each other. Take a break if you need to.

There are lots of reasons for keeping negotiations as fair and pleasant as possible, not the least of which is that at some future point, you may need to go back and renegotiate a portion of the agreement. Open relationships, for example, require constant renegotiation as circumstances, people, and desires change. Winning an ugly battle is never a win if no one wants to go back to the table to amend the agreement when things change.

Negotiating for Ecstatic Relationships

Negotiating in our intimate relationships can be about a lot more than a search for solutions. It can be a wonderful opportunity to create “magic rooms” in which we can play out our deepest desires and dive into our Totality of Possibilities. In order to do that, the negotiation process must be a safe and fun space in which we may open up and express our deepest desires.

In intimate relationships the facts don’t matter nearly as much as the feelings. If we’re honest with ourselves, we’ll admit that this is also true in business, politics, and international relations. Our society encourages us to focus on facts and debate, which it considers more “real” and more important than feelings. But even when we pretend that “it’s all about the facts,”
our strongly held opinions are always accompanied by equally strong emotions. Famous negotiators have written books and taught expensive courses in which they encourage other negotiators not to show emotion. But that’s not possible or effective in the realm of the erotic and the ecstatic. **Feelings are the essence of the ecstatic process.**

Negotiating in intimate relationships requires emotion-based guidelines:

**Stay in touch with your deeper feelings and desires.** In [Chapter 1](#) you had the opportunity to discover your authentic needs and desires. Look over the notes in your journal, or do the exercise again prior to negotiating your next erotic adventure. (See page 42.)

**Take responsibility for getting your needs met.** Whether you are negotiating the plans for a date, or the future of a long-term erotic partnership, make sure you pay equal attention to your own needs and the needs of others. It’s often most effective to focus on one person’s needs at a time. If you are better at giving than receiving, set a timer so that all parties involved get equal time.

**Stay at the Resilient Edge of Resistance of your feelings.** Do not collapse into your emotions and allow the expression of your feelings to override the purpose of the negotiation, which is to find an agreement. Do not use your feelings as a controlling
mechanism to make others feel guilty or sorry for you. Instead, breathe, stay present with your feelings, and allow your emotions to inform and guide you through the negotiation.

Communicate with an intention of self-discovery—not to produce a particular response from the other person. Imagine the person you are speaking with is interviewing you for a television show or a magazine article. This will focus your thinking and speaking. You’ll likely find surprising new insights—about yourself, or about the issue you’re discussing. When your intention in negotiation is self-discovery rather than convincing someone to see or do things your way, you’ll avoid disappointment if they don’t react the way you want them to. Plus, you are more likely to reach an agreement when the other person does not feel pushed to change in some way.

Focus on the future not the past. Talking about new erotic possibilities can bring up painful memories of disappointment, betrayal, shame, and guilt. Please remember that our brains have a tendency to believe that if something didn’t work out well the first time it won’t work out the next time. Breathe. Bring yourself back to the present moment. Look forward: How do you want the situation to look now and in the future?

See the big picture. Get some perspective. Imagine yourself looking down from a mountaintop. Realize how small your
issue is in relation to all the issues of all the beings in your view. Or simply ask, “Who’ll know in a hundred years?”

Open Heart Before Engaging Mouth

We’ve all heard the phrase “think before you speak.” In our eagerness—or desperation—to share our thoughts and feelings, our passion often gets the better of us and we say something that hurts someone else.

The need to express our feelings does not give us permission to turn off our brains. As Kahlil Gibran wrote,

Your reason and your passion are the rudder and the sails of your seafaring soul. If either your sails or your rudder be broken, you can but toss and drift, or else be held at a standstill in mid-seas.

Although we want to be able to speak in plain, simple language, we also want to be thoughtful and gentle. How do we convey our message, especially when someone is resistant to hearing what we have to say? How do we talk about difficult subjects without losing control and saying things we later wish we hadn’t?

Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D., begins his book Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life with:

What I want in my life is compassion, a flow between myself and others based
on a mutual giving from the heart.

Rosenberg, who developed the process called Nonviolent Communication, uses the term *nonviolence* the way Gandhi used it, “to refer to our natural state of compassion when violence has subsided from the heart.” In some communities the same process is referred to as Compassionate Communication.

Compassionate Communication helps us reframe both how we express ourselves and how we hear others. It is a style of conscious communication rooted in our awareness of what we perceive, feel, or want. The basic model can be summarized this way:

*When X happens...* We describe X factually.

We observe X without evaluating or making judgments about X.

...I *feel Y*... We distinguish our feelings from our thoughts. We especially try to access and express our deeper, softer, more subtle emotions.

...because *I needed Z*. We identify and speak about our fundamental needs and wants.

*Would you be willing to...?* We request concrete actions that can be carried out in the present moment.

You don’t need to speak according to this exact script. You simply need to be conscious of the four components: observations, feelings, needs, and requests.

For example, let’s assume that your primary
partner in your non-monogamous relationship has recently been seeing someone new and you are feeling some jealousy. To express this using Compassionate Communication, you might say, “When you are out with someone else and come home later than you said you would, I feel lost and alone because I’m afraid you won’t come back to me. Could you please sit with me and tell me why you love me?”

The second part of Compassionate Communication is receiving empathetically—attempting to hear the need expressed by what the speaker just said. Your partner might reply, “Are you reacting to how many evenings I was out this week?” Or, “Are you feeling hurt because you would have liked more attention from me lately?” This kind of empathetic response allows you to express more of your feelings and ultimately get more of your needs met. In this case, you might not only receive what you requested—an outpouring of reasons why your partner loves you—but also a suggestion that the two of you go away for a romantic weekend.

One of the most effective ways to learn this model is to start with yourself. Much like the advice, “Put on your own oxygen mask before attempting to help others,” we must learn to act compassionately toward ourselves before we can make a compassionate impact in our relationships and on the world.

Simply notice your next self-judgmental thought. For example: How could I have forgotten to send Jane a birthday card? I am so
stupid! Ask yourself, What need lies behind my judgment of myself as stupid? Perhaps the reason you forgot to send the card is because you have been working 60-hour weeks and need more unstructured time to yourself. How can you meet your own needs? Would you be willing to insist on a weekend off, even though it might mean upsetting your boss?

Compassionate Communication is a way of holding an intention of compassion for both ourselves and others. When we listen and treat ourselves with compassion we can more easily hold other higher intentions, such as pleasure, love, gratitude, and acceptance.

Active Listening

Active listening simply means conscious listening. It means that you are present to take in and appreciate someone else’s message with relaxed, alive awareness.

We listen actively when we listen with the same level of conscious intention with which we speak. This is sometimes referred to as the “voice that listens.” On a practical level, you may be listening for information, for something that will convince you, or excite you, or seduce you. But on a higher level, you could also listen with the intention to receive love, or with the intention to hear someone’s true nature, or with the intention to experience someone’s best. When you listen with your highest intentions, you’ll find that you’ll listen twice as long as you’ll speak.
You can set a specific intention for your listening in advance of a conversation. For example, you might choose to listen with the intention to hear the expression of someone’s most courageous self. Should the conversation become challenging, you can decide to listen with an appreciation of the bravery it takes for your beloved to speak about this sensitive issue. When you listen in this way, you release yourself from the expectations of a particular outcome and open yourself—and your partner—to the Totality of Possibilities of a bigger picture.

The first step in conscious listening is, of course, to be present. You are present when you are actively receiving what is being said. You are not present if you are lost inside your own mind, planning your next speech. Mindful listening encourages an expanded awareness that also allows you to take in the nonverbal aspects of someone’s language. Match your breath to their breath. Look into their eyes when you can—with the intention to see the best nature of their soul. Notice their body language. Does it seem tight and closed in? Open and expansive? Listen to the tone, speed, and pitch of their speech. Try to feel the emotion behind the language.

Stepping this wholly into someone’s speech can feel scary, especially if the subject is difficult. Ironically though, when you are willing to totally commit to hearing someone, you can move past any uncomfortable stage quite quickly.

Feedback is another key piece of active listening. Some people think they are being
gracious and respectful when they give you all the time in the world to speak and don’t say a word or change facial expression until you ask them directly, “Well, how do you feel about this?” Silent, unresponsive listening—unless agreed upon in advance—can be unproductive and even destructive. Think about what happens in those stereotypical cartoons in which a psychoanalyst is sitting on a chair behind a patient who is lying on a couch facing away from them. The psychoanalyst begins the session with, “How are you today?” then proceeds to read a book for the rest of the hour while the patient runs the gamut from storytelling to intense emotional outbursts to profound realizations and only stops when the psychoanalyst says, “That’s all for today. I’ll see you next week.” The patient gets off the couch and then thanks the psychoanalyst for their invaluable help.

Much like that patient, when we experience the void of silence we are tempted to fill it—with anything! If we are negotiating intense, troubled waters, desperately trying to make ourselves understood, we will tend to keep talking if we do not receive any feedback. We start to imagine what our partner might be thinking. We answer imaginary questions we think they must be silently asking. We may start expressing long-held feelings that have nothing to do with the topic at hand. We are likely to say things we don’t really mean, or exaggerate our feelings just to get some reaction from our partner. The conversation can go completely off topic and out
of control.

A conversation is not psychoanalysis. We need feedback. Although it is not appropriate to interrupt our partner, neither is it appropriate to sit in front of them impassive and silent. But let’s suppose that you are the listener, and you are horrified, disappointed, saddened, or angry at what is being said. You really are speechless. Even if you cannot make a single constructive remark, you can acknowledge the speaker with a nod, or an, “I see.”

One common and effective communication tool that is especially helpful when you don’t know what else to say, is to summarize what you believe the other person has said and repeat it back to them. For example, “I believe what I heard you say was that you feel I am not interested in the sexual pleasures available through bondage because I don’t know enough about it. Did I get that right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Then the person can continue on with whatever they were saying, or you might say:

“Okay. May I ask a question?”

“Sure.”

“Do you think I don’t know enough about it because I don’t have as much experience as you, or because I have not done enough research, or because I don’t spend enough time thinking about it?”

Often, asking the right questions and getting clarification gives you a point of entry into the conversation that wasn’t open to you while you were sitting silently with your horror, sadness,
or disappointment.

If you are the speaker, stop talking once in a while—even if you have more to say—and check in with the other person. Ask, “Do you have anything you’d like to say?” Or, “I’m curious to hear how you feel about what I just said.” Or, “Was I clear on that last point? Do you want to tell me what you heard?”

There are times when someone may need or want to talk without interruption. This can provide an opportunity for the speaker to access their deeper feelings and may lead to insights that would not have been revealed another way. This style of speaking—sometimes referred to as a talking circle—is also good for group discussions and brainstorming sessions. The rules for a talking circle are simple: Each person is allowed to speak until they feel they have said everything they need to say. Then it’s the next person’s turn to speak. Depending on the nature of the circle, this next person may speak about their feelings, or may reply to the person who has just spoken.

There is one modification I will sometimes add to a talking-circle format to more fully support someone in saying everything they need to say. When someone says they are finished, I sometimes ask, “Is there more?” This question often prompts the realization of some hidden insight—and in the case of someone trying to express their erotic desire—the most exciting sexual scenario. Remember, the question is, “Is there more?” Never ask someone, “Are you done?” That’s a sure way of shutting down any
possibility of a further creative thought or a deeper emotion.

**Watch for Unspoken Expectations**

Be careful that you aren’t basing your agreements on unspoken conditions, expectations, or assumptions.

When my friend Kevin broke up with his longtime girlfriend, Laura, they agreed that they would alternate their attendance at a holiday festival they used to attend together. Shortly after their breakup, Kevin went to the festival alone and had a wonderful time. Upon his return, Laura asked Kevin for a period of non-communication while she healed from the break up. Kevin was sad about this and feared that they would no longer be friends. In my conversation with him about the festival and their arrangement, he said, “We made an agreement that I would go this year but not go next year, so that she could go alone or with someone else. But now I’m reconsidering that agreement.” “Why?” I asked. “Because,” he said, “when we made that agreement it was based on the fact that we would remain friends.”

“Oh really?” I asked. “Did you state that condition when you made the agreement?”

“Well no, not exactly. But I just assumed that’s the way it would work out.”

“So friendship is a condition that you are now applying retroactively and unilaterally to your agreement with Laura? Kev in, friendship was never mentioned or agreed upon as a condition.
and of itself is both an exquisite experience and a powerful intention. Too often, in our search for ecstasy, we unconsciously assume that our usual habits, conventions, and customs will lead us where we’d like to go. We may take for granted that our partner wants what we want, and that things will go as we wish. Consciously and deliberately writing down our desires can feel a little awkward at first. Once you try it, however, you may discover that it can be an intensely delightful turn-on.

**EXERCISE: YES NO MAYBE LIST**

Take a large piece of paper and make a list of all the erotic, sexual, kinky activities you can think of, including those that you are not personally interested in. If possible, do this with a lover, a friend, or in a group. Other people will come up with activities that you haven’t thought of. As an added benefit, any time we talk about sex in a playful and positive manner with one or more other people, we reduce shame and give people permission to be more erotically adventurous.

Once you have your large list, take another piece of paper and divide it into three columns titled Yes, No, and Maybe. Write all the items that you like or that you would like to try in the Yes column. In the No column, write all the things that you have absolutely no interest in at this time. In the Maybe column, write all the things you might like to try if you felt safe enough, and if all the circumstances were right.

The next time you want to plan an erotic encounter—which, after you’ve made this list
could be immediately—go back over your Yes/No/Maybe list. Choose from the Yes column all the activities that you want and need in your erotic encounter right now—for example—oral sex, a spanking, and an orgasm. Then select some items from the Maybe list—perhaps an erotic food fight, biting and scratching, or hair pulling. If the person you are negotiating with is happy to give you oral sex, a spanking, and an orgasm, and is also potentially interested in an erotic food fight, biting and scratching, or hair pulling, you’re with the right partner on the right night. If this person is not interested in giving you oral sex, a spanking, and an orgasm, you might want to find someone else to play with. Or, you could revisit your list to see if other activities would fulfill the same desires and needs. Or you might wait until another night when this person is able to give you what you want.

Even negotiations about potentially uncomfortable subjects such as safer sex can be made passionate, playful, and fun. (Those of you who have already established safer-sex protocols with your current partner(s) can skip ahead to page 203. You can always come back to this when you need it.) I suggest you prepare in advance for this conversation with a little two to three minute personal statement of your sexual health status and safer-sex practices. You can use it in the consent/negotiation/sharing process with any new partner before any sexual activity takes place. Here’s an example:
Hi. My name is __________. I have tested positive for ______________ [insert name of sexually transmitted infection, if any. Give details if appropriate.]. I was last tested ______________ [insert how long ago] for ______________ [insert name(s) of other STIs and give result of those tests]. My safer-sex practices are ________________ _____________. [insert how you practice safer sex, for example, “I use condoms for all penetrative sex, including oral. I use plastic wrap for oral sex on women. I use gloves for penetrative sex with my hands. I use condoms and gloves on all sex toys.”] I love ______________ [insert types of sexual activity you enjoy or would be interested in doing with this person.]. I am not fond of ______________ [insert types of sexual activity you do not enjoy or do not want to do with this person].

In order to make this little elevator speech a turn-on instead of a turnoff, give the details of any sexually transmitted infections simply and succinctly. Slow down and take a bit more time to describe your safer-sex practices. Show your enthusiasm when you tell them the types of sexual activity you like. Then, ask them their status and safer-sex practices. Listen passionately and without judgment. When you
are both finished, you can begin negotiations about how and if you might want to play together.

Thus far, our discussion of ecstatic communication has focused on the written or spoken word. Here are four sensual exercises designed to explore and expand your nonverbal ecstatic communication skills.

**Exercise: A Sensuous Buffet**

In this exercise, you’ll feed your blindfolded partner morsels of a variety of foods. Your partner will nonverbally communicate their delight—or disgust—with each taste.

Each of you will begin by gathering as wide a variety of tastes as possible. Be sure to include sweet, sour, bitter, and salty tastes, as well as a variety of textures. Here are a few ideas: chocolate, fruit, mustard, whipped cream, salsa, a sparkling beverage, a salty snack, diluted lemon juice, sweet or sour pickles.

**Giving partner:** Blindfold your partner. (Or for extra fun, put them in bondage.) Just make sure that the only sense completely blocked out for the entire exercise is sight. Now, feed your partner. Go s-l-o-w-l-y. Run a tasty morsel over their lips and tongue but don’t let them bite it. Allow them to experience the aroma, texture, and temperature of the food, and only then let them have a small bite. Feed your partner with the intention of helping them appreciate every nuance of the food.

**Receiving partner:** Enter as totally as you can
into the experience of the food and of being fed. If you like the morsel you taste, ask for more by making “yum” sounds, by reaching for more with your tongue, or by licking your partner's fingers. Express your displeasure by scrunching up your face, making “icklike” noises, or turning away.

After a certain number of tastes, or a certain amount of time, switch places.

This exercise can get ridiculously funny. It can also cause you to drop deliciously deeply into your body, your connection with each other, and into the flavors of the food.

**EXERCISE: BODY PAINTING**

In this exercise you'll communicate with your partner by means of color and touch.

You can buy non-toxic body paints in sex shops, novelty shops, and art supply stores. A quick Internet search will turn up many outlets. You can use your hands, paintbrushes, or sponges to apply the paint. You need no artistic skill. Simply invite your nude partner to lie down on a paint-friendly surface (an old sheet placed over a plastic drop cloth works well) and declare your love, lust, and/or delight for this beautiful being by covering them with color. You can turn them into an abstract expressionist painting or a creature from the woods. You can paint them to express how you see them, or to bring out some aspect of their inner beauty.

This exercise is a tactile experience as well as a visual one, so be sure that each stroke of color feels as good as it looks.
Receiving partner: While you’re being painted, show your appreciation for the sensual touch with moans and groans. If the brushes tickle, squeal in protest—or delight! When you see yourself as a completed work of art, act out whatever or whoever you have become.

**EXERCISE: A SHARED SHOWER**

In this exercise you’ll communicate with your lover with scent, texture, touch, water—and fruit! Before inviting your beloved into the shower for a wordless bathing ritual, gather luxurious scents and textures. In addition to washcloths, loofah sponges, and bath salts, you can slice oranges, grapefruit, limes, and lemons in halves or quarters and use them as bath sponges. Rub them all over your lover’s body.

The aroma of the citrus is amplified by the hot water and steam.

Show your lover how much you adore their body by how you touch and how long you linger. You can drip the fruit juice into your lover’s mouth or lick it off their body. Show your appreciation with moans, groans, kisses, licks, and bites. You can bathe each other simultaneously, or take turns giving and receiving.

**EXERCISE: BREATHING AND EYE-GAZING**

This exercise is simple, but not always easy, especially if it’s new for you. Breathing and eye-gazing are deeply intimate acts and it can take a few minutes to get past the awkward,
giggly stage.

Sit comfortably across from your partner and gently gaze into their eyes. Feel free to choose just one eye if that makes it easier to keep your gaze consistent.

Now breathe. Take full, gentle breaths. Allow your breath to synchronize with your partner’s.

There is no need to do anything more. Just breathe together and gaze into your partner’s eyes.

Sometimes you can feel an emotional conversation taking place. Other times it seems that nothing—and everything—is being said all at once. Sometimes your partner’s face will seem to change.

When you are finished, close your eyes and meditate for a few moments. Silently witness your feelings.

Whether the language you use in the creation of—or in the midst of—an ecstatic encounter is verbal or nonverbal, the emphasis is on love—sharing love, co-creating love, returning to love. When your intention is to speak from a space of love—for yourself as well as the person you are speaking with—the words are merely a jumping-off point. You become the meaning of the words. When communication itself crosses over into the ecstatic, it feels more like you are drinking in your partner than listening to them. The silence between the words becomes intoxicating—more significant than the words themselves. The meaning shines through your eyes, your touch, your very being.