

# The Art of Relational Flow

by shems heartwell

“Staying in flow with your partner is like constantly exploring a new frontier together.”

**When I work with couples, the first thing I** look for is whether they are communicating in a way that feeds connection or creates friction. I call this relating from flow or fear. It’s not always this simple; however, it is an effective way to bring awareness to what may be getting in the way of quality connection.

Flow is a state of being in tune with the present moment. It is what happens when we are operating on all cylinders and participating with the full-spectrum experience of the moment. When you are in flow, not just with yourself but also with someone you truly care about, that’s when relationship gets juicy. The intensity and absorption of a flow state becomes communion when you share it with another person. In flow we feel each other, share thoughts, and, like masterful musicians, we know what notes to play to stay in a melodic dance together.

Staying in flow with your partner is like constantly exploring a new frontier together. Even though you may go to work each day,

drop the kids off at school and live in the same house for many years, there are always new frontiers of experience to open to and share.

So how do we keep finding and returning to flow when life’s responsibilities and challenges take the wind out of our sails? When the daily grind leaves so little time for quality connection and mutual understanding? Or when the passion of the honeymoon phase wears off, and the fire is not so hot?

In my opinion this is what good relationship counseling or coaching is ideally focused on. How to get couples to experience more flow, more love, more passion and more connection while breaking the habits that perpetuate frustration and disconnection.

Unfortunately, we aren’t taught how to stay deeply and passionately connected to each other for the long haul. On one hand, we are fed the “happily ever after” story and sexy romances in the media. Then, in our daily reality, we see failed marriages, experience our own relationship struggles and long for more



“Flow releases some of the most potent neurochemicals for motivation, learning and well-being.

from our partner.

Most couples wander through the pitfalls of relationship without a lot of guidance. We might not want to repeat the patterns of our parents' generation, but somehow we get caught in the fast-paced modern-day chaos and lose the magic and flow in our lives.

If you want to get back into flow within yourself and with your beloved, you need to know what gets you out of flow. Awareness of our own pitfalls is the first step in a new direction. I have dedicated much of my focus to understanding what erodes relationships and what works to stay in the positive flow of fulfilling connection.

Here are some of the main ways people get out of flow in their relationship:

- » We feel too tired, distracted or distant to allow sex to be a rejuvenating experience.
- » The stresses and challenges of work, raising a family and generating money build up tension and resentment.

» Conflict between couples grows and becomes a recycled pattern, without finding solutions or alignment.

» Couples lose charge or excitement as they spend more and more time together as domestic partners and busy parents.

» Partners rarely slow down and listen deeply enough to hear and understand one another's needs and desires.

» Seeking and finding tension relief through alcohol, sports or social media and not prioritizing it with your partner.

We all know that it's easy to get out of flow; yet, despite all the modern-day challenges, I know it is possible to create more flow at any time in your life and relationship. In fact, I believe that our relationships can become the place that brings us back to our center, back into balance. I have experienced miraculous shifts in clients and myself over and over

when we initiate connection in new and creative ways.

Relational flow is something we can deliberately create more of with intention and commitment. It doesn't require talking about or sharing our feelings (unless you want to). You can shift into a flowing connection at anytime and allow it to improve many relationship dynamics and patterns at a level that is beyond thought or understanding. Through openness and connection with your partner, your neural chemistry comes into play in a way that allows effortless and profound healing and transformation.

Imagine how it feels when you receive deep care and loving touch from your partner. Now amplify that within you by being willing to receive the attention even more fully, and return it to them through your eyes and heart. This is how you begin to establish flow together. By putting down your busyness, stress and tensions and moving toward one another as a meditational practice of devotion and connection, you open to a fresh and

new moment of potential together.

Couples who become skillful at sharing flow together stay together because they are continually expanding the bridge between them. Flow releases some of the most potent neurochemicals for motivation, learning and well-being—norepinephrine, dopamine, endorphins, anandamide and oxytocin—many of which increase the feelings of romantic love and sexual desire.

Obviously, we want more flow connection in our relationships because it makes everything better. Now, before sharing about how to get into flow, let's go a little deeper into what really stops flow.

Fear and resistance are the major causative factors in most relationship struggles. Fear can show up in many ways and is usually an attempt from our subconscious to keep us safe in some way. Fear that is felt and acknowledged gives us the potential to consciously respond.

Resistance is what stops us from facing and feeling what is really happening in an import-



“What does not get directly expressed will either be indirectly expressed or become a buildup of tension that blocks the flow.

ant moment. Many of my clients tell me that it is not resistance that stops them; they believe that they are too busy or overwhelmed to take the time to really feel. This may be true; however, I usually find that what is buried under the busyness and overwhelm is actually fear and resistance.

Resistance is what happens when we are uncomfortable in some way. Instead of moving into the discomfort, most people have learned to avoid it or think their way through it. If I am not honest with you about something because I expect that you will react about what I did or didn't do, then I am relating with you from fear and resistance rather than from authentic expression.

The small ways that most of us resist emotional expression or hold back our authenticity usually become the big waves of friction that we experience. What does not get directly expressed will either be indirectly expressed or become a buildup of tension that eventually congests the flow of energy between you and your lover.

In a healthy relationship, much like a

healthy body, we are able to exchange and release energy and tension efficiently and effectively through our breath, body movement and expression. This keeps energy fluidly moving.

If you've grown up with the primary conditioning of the Western world, chances are there are ways that you stop the flow of expression or bury emotions inside of you, and this blocks you from feeling your full vitality and creative energy. You may not consciously be aware of any withheld energy or stuck emotions as you go through your daily routine, but it is very likely that you have pent-up, unexpressed energy that you have resisted feeling. Stagnant energy and stuffed emotions become a buildup of sludge in the plumbing of your subconscious mind. They are the reason that many of us have overly active and hypercritical minds that are working on overtime.

The good news is that you can move energy and skillfully transform any stickiness into usable fuel that generates more flow and aliveness. Everything in your life happens





“Our bodies are a universe of intelligence that speak to us through sensations of pleasure, pain and aliveness.

more easily when you feel positive energy moving through you, especially your relationships.

I have helped countless numbers of people to reclaim their energy and flow through a powerful process that will be described below. If you engage in the following process consistently over the next month, you will notice significant and obvious feelings of more energy, flow and connection with your partner.

### How to Get Back into Flow

To begin with, I want to invite you to become interested in and curious about all the experiences happening within and all around you right now. Take a few moments to listen and notice: What do you feel in your belly? How are your toes and spine? What is the beating of your heart like when you breathe in? What sounds are happening in the room around you? What can you smell in the air right now?

Life is a vast landscape of impulses, sensations and responses. For most people our

thoughts about what is happening or what we think should be happening are preventing us from truly experiencing what is happening.

Our bodies are a universe of intelligence that speak to us through sensations of pleasure, pain and aliveness. Like the sensitive whiskers of a cat, our bodies can perceive far more than most of us are utilizing. When you turn on your full perception you begin to enter the flow state.

You can choose where you focus your attention. If you wish to feel more flow then turn on more of your senses. Feel the force (that has been popularized by the *Star Wars* movies) moving within you. It's always here; we simply have our attention on other things.

Flow is widely known as getting into “the zone” in sports. But it is also what the Tai Qi masters and yogis have done for centuries to elevate their consciousness into states of unity and bliss. Hunters access flow when they tune deeply into the wilderness with all of their senses on tap. Lovers access flow as arousal blooms through their bodies.

Flow is our true baseline of reality. It's how indigenous people survive when walking through thick jungles or sitting around the fire listening for potential predators around them.

In relationship, we engage in flow when we make connection. Through a glance or an embrace, you exchange information and energy with your partner. If they are receptive, then there is some form of response. The more available each of you is to follow your impulses and stay tuned to yourself and your partner, the greater the potential for a captivating flow of energy between you.

In any moment you and your lover can pause from anything you may be doing and share a toss of connection. This is very easy and totally enlivening in the beginning stages of a relationship because this person is new to you and there is a great deal of unknown that has you fully engaged.

The secret to flow is to stay engaged in your interactions—engaged with your own inner experience and highly aware of and respon-

sive to your partner. Like tossing two Frisbees between you, you must stay focused or you get out of sync with one another.

To become skillful at establishing flow with your partner, it is a good idea to intentionally practice for a while. Here are a few steps that you can do together that will get you synced up and flowing together:

#### 1. Begin by planning a 15-minute to one-hour time slot and remove any distractions.

Create a sacred space and time to be with your partner with minimal distractions. Turn off your phone, computer, or anything else that habitually draws your attention. Pick a time when you know that you'll be able to dive into this experience without interruption.

#### 2. Shake out any tension together.

Open and release together by gently shaking your whole body for one minute. Shaking helps you quickly let go of stresses and con-







“This form of getting into flow can be practiced over a matter of minutes or extended for hours together.

gested energy. It is a simple, powerful and effective technique to relax your body and nervous system. For many people it can be a lot more effective than trying to meditate when you have had a busy day.

To begin stand three to five feet away from one another, with your feet shoulder-width apart, and close your eyes. Start shaking by gently bouncing in an up-and-down motion. Your arms can either hang loosely or be actively shaken in concert with the rest of your body. Shake for about a minute. Finish the exercise by making the motions smaller and smaller until they are physically imperceptible. Then be still and feel the continuing internal vibrations. You may feel warm tingly and more relaxed with increased blood and Qi flow.

### 3. Get still, connect and breathe deeply.

Sit facing one another in a chair or on the floor. Look into each other's eyes and take ten slow, deep breaths.

While doing this, pay close attention to

tracking your body sensations and overall emotional state. When we become still, like calm water, we can tune into where the ripples are happening inside of us.

Use your breath to connect your mind to your body. Breathe deeply, expanding your breath and awareness into every part of your body. As you do this, you may notice places in your body where you are holding physical tension; hopefully, you will also notice pleasurable areas as well as sensations of aliveness. (Sensations of aliveness are tingling, pulsations of blood moving throughout your body, heat or energy circulation.)

Do your best to relax your shoulders, your eyes and jaw while allowing your belly to expand in all directions as you breathe in.

### 4. Tune into your partner.

Be fully present with this beloved in front of you and breathe into the experience. Notice him/her with an eye of appreciation and curiosity. Don't say anything—but laugh if you need to break the ice for a moment—and

then return to being engaged and sensitively aware.

Allow this to be a minute or two of time before organically taking the next step.

### 5. Move closer to your partner and establish a physical connection.

Inch yourselves closer and put a hand either on each other's legs or heart. Feel your partner's breathing pattern. Use your expanded sensitivity literally to feel into your partner energetically.

Begin feeling and sending appreciation and love to your partner. Literally, feel care and love inside of you and intend to give it to your partner through your eyes, heart and physical connection.

At the same time, be willing to receive and allow your partner's care and energy to flow into you.

### 6. Follow your impulses wherever they may take you together.

Let the flow between you become a current of creative connection. Move into embracing each other, rolling around on the floor or into passionate lovemaking.

What's important is to stay in the rhythm of impulse and experience, without having your mind steal the show with over activity.

This form of getting into flow can be practiced over a matter of minutes or extended for hours together. The goal is to easily connect and exchange energy in creative ways effortlessly and often. The better you get at finding moments of deep connection and even inspiration together, the more fuel you will have for the day-to-day details.

### Taking Flow in Your Relationship to the Next Level

If you want to really fire up your flow connection, then commit to having sex as a practice. Whether you are feeling it or not, plan time to engage regularly in sexual sharing together.

There is no faster path to flow than to activate your sexual aliveness together. When you are juicing up the neurochemistry of love,

“There is no faster path to flow than to activate your sexual aliveness together.

you'll realize how much energy you have to give. You'll go from holding back and resisting sexual connection to looking forward to the rejuvenating pleasure and energy you experience when sharing these special times with your lover.

Think about it. You don't wait until you're feeling awesome to go to the gym or to floss your teeth. You do both of those things because you know they are important and good for you. The same is true for relating in flow. Once you get into a rhythm of sharing flow with your partner, you will look forward to more of it.

Flow is like practicing an instrument: It can be very hard at first and takes time to build a foundation of chords and dexterity. Then it becomes something that soothes your soul and keeps you desiring to learn and practice more. Take the time and make the commitment, and you will feel more fulfilled in your life and relationship.

**Shems Heartwell** is a certified relationship coach and author of the book *Empowered Loving: A Guide To Learning and Growing Through Relationships*. Shems specializes in guiding couples into new territories of deeper connection, intimacy, and fulfillment together. He leads private couples retreats and intensives on the beautiful island of Maui. Visit his website: [shemsheartwell.com](http://shemsheartwell.com)