

Author's Note, 2014

Welcome to *The Highly Sensitive Person in Love*. You may have noticed that it was first published in 2000, yet there is very little I would change in it, and the points I would add are right here in this note. The most important new material is about the latest research on high sensitivity in general as well as some nice research relating specifically to close relationships. At the end I will also offer a few thoughts about love and highly sensitive people that I have gained in my experience with them over the intervening years.

[Level A]The Importance for HSPs in Love to Understand the Research on High Sensitivity

Why does the recent research matter so much? In order for highly sensitive persons (HSPs) to be successful in their close relationships--whether with a friend, a special relative, or a lifetime love partnership--they need to take this innate trait of high sensitivity seriously. It needs to feel real. The trait can make or break their happiness, depending on how well they and the other person involved understand it. The same need to understand high sensitivity applies to anyone wishing to support a pair that includes an HSP, for example marriage counselors. This new research makes high sensitive very easy to understand and very real. Of course, if you do feel it is real, do take it seriously, and do not feel like reading about scientific research, at least right now, you can skip this note.

Why do people often *not* take high sensitivity seriously? One reason is that it is a mostly invisible trait until you are around an HSP long enough to notice certain needs and preferences, such as wanting more downtime or disliking loud noises. High sensitivity is not like hair color, height, or gender. Yet I think this trait has as much impact as gender, in that it affects all aspects of life—how you perceive the world and think about it, the kind of work that suits you, and how you get along with others and how they get along with you. There are people who say yes to every item on the self-test “Are You Highly Sensitive” in this book, and people who say no to every item. We all live in the same communities, but we have very different needs and we cannot easily recognize who is sensitive, who is not. Not being able to see it or even have a good term for it until now, the huge differences in how people behave are blamed on everything except the real cause. HSPs tend to see others as rude or “clueless”; non-HSPs can see HSPs as fussy or completely neurotic.

Another reason that sometimes people do not take high sensitivity seriously is that the majority of people, 80%, are not highly sensitive. Seeing no visible difference, non-HSPs think everyone is like them, and sometimes even HSPs themselves think they are or ought to be like non-HSPs. This can be a real source of aggravation in relationships, because we tend to think that if someone is doing something that doesn't suit us, they ought to be able to change that behavior if they really love us. For example, often non-HSPs think everyone should enjoy noisy restaurants or “small talk,” and someone who doesn't is just being fussy, difficult, or demanding. No, this difference makes noisy restaurants and trivial

conversations fine for some but almost unbearable to those who are highly sensitive. Again, this trait is real.

[Level A]The Original Research

In *The Highly Sensitive Person in Love* I wrote less about the original research and more about the research I did for that book, on relationships in which one or both were HSPs. But as a prelude to the research that has occurred since this book was published, I want to reaffirm that the concept of high sensitivity itself was already well researched at the time by others, partly under other terms that were less accurate, but also by myself and my husband along with our research collaborators.

Our first research was published in 1997 in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, the most prestigious publication in that field. (As with the rest of the research I will mention here, the references can be found on my website, www.hsperson.com under the “research” tab.) That paper reported seven studies of what I call in the scientific context “sensory processing sensitivity.” These studies developed and statistically validated the self-test found in this book and elsewhere by giving it to hundreds of people, including a random phone survey. In the process we were able to show that sensitivity differs from both introversion and what is called neuroticism, which is the tendency to be anxious or depressed or both. I also began to discuss in the 1997 paper the evolutionary reasons that this trait (sometimes called plasticity, flexibility, responsiveness, or sensitivity to context) is found in about the same percentage of individuals, 20%, in many different species. The reason is that there can actually be two best survival strategies in a given environment, depending on the situation. The sensitive strategy is to observe carefully and take those observations into account before acting. Because of this behavior of hesitating and sometimes fleeing a situation, earlier terms for the trait were shy, timid, or fearful. The other strategy is to act quickly, “boldly,” without much attention to the situation.

[Level A]About Neuroticism and HSPs

In the 1997 paper we found high sensitivity was associated with neuroticism, but only for people with unhappy childhoods. Wanting to understand this with more focused methods, we conducted the research reported in a 2005 paper published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. In four surveys and one experiment we demonstrated that adult HSPs who have had difficulties in childhood, especially their bond with their parents, are more likely to be depressed, anxious, or shy than non-HSPs, but HSPs with normal, good-enough childhoods had no more of these problems in adulthood as non-HSPs. In the experiment we found that HSPs in general reacted more emotionally to good and bad feedback, while non-HSPs hardly responded at all, perhaps explaining the means by which their childhoods affected them more.

A great deal of research since 1997 has found the same result, that HSPs (and others with unusual temperaments) raised in supportive environments are even less likely than non-HSPs to be troubled as

adults, and are also more affected in a positive way by attempts to help them. These results are so clear that in 2012 Michael Pluess and Jay Belsky published “Vantage Sensitivity” in *Psychological Bulletin*, reviewing the evidence from many diverse research studies that sensitivity individuals are able to make better use of good environments than others are. True, many sensitive persons have had difficult histories, and this does affect their relationships—being anxious or depressed is one of the biggest predictors of relationship failure. But the good news is that HSPs do not necessarily have these problems, and if they do, they will heal more easily if they receive the right help from their partners and, when needed, from professionals who understand their trait.

As I perhaps did not point out enough in this book, HSPs are sometimes seen as neurotic or troubled even when they are not, which can put them one down in a relationship with a non-HSP because both think there is something wrong with them. This 2006 research and the other studies since on the interaction of environment and sensitivity should help.

In some ways HSPs can act like neurotics, but for other reasons. For example, both could be anxious when others are watching them perform. Neurotics might do this because they have been criticized a great deal as children. HSPs do this because they are more easily overaroused in highly stimulating or unfamiliar situations, such as having people watching them.

Realizing that HSPs can respond like neurotics but for sensitivity-related reasons has also improved our research methods. Because the HSP self-test in this book has a number of negative sounding items that could be answered “true” either because of being highly sensitive or because of being neurotic, we now take that into account by asking a few questions about neuroticism and statistically “partialing out” that factor when analyzing our research data. Most of the studies that follow did that.

Of course some HSPs are also neurotic, and those anxious, distressed, “touchy” HSPs may be the ones others notice most. This can leave the impression that all HSPs are that way. The typical HSP, however, adapts so well that his or her differences are hardly noticed except by those who know them well—or when they are answering our self-test. After all, the essence of their trait is adapting. They take note of and respond to their environment in the way that will best help them to survive and thrive.

[Level A] Revisiting the Issue of Neuroticism in Light of the The Four Aspects of High Sensitivity

To explain a little more why sensitivity is confused with neuroticism, I will discuss it, and the new research to follow, in the light of four aspects of high sensitivity. I first listed these in a book for professionals, *Psychotherapy and the Highly Sensitive Person*, published in 2010. However, they seem to be very meaningful to HSPs in general and to the people around them. The four aspects are depth of processing, being easily over stimulated or over aroused, being more emotionally reactive—and more empathic—than others, and sensing subtleties in their environment that others miss.

HSPs quietly reflecting on their experiences, processing information thoroughly even if not always consciously, pondering the meaning of life, being especially conscientious, having difficulty making decisions—these are some of the results of depth of processing and the key to sensitivity really as a specialized survival strategy. However, sometimes reflecting on a troubling experience seems to others like “ruminating” and can appear neurotic. For example, they do see potential dangers (and opportunities) that others miss and thus can seem “overly” anxious compared to those who are more oblivious (HSPs tend to notice the location of fire exits). Of course, again, sometimes HSPs really do focus too much on negative experiences, but this will be due to having had too many negative experiences in the past. Having processed these carefully, it is their nature to expect the future to be similar, and often they would be right, although not always, and it is the “not always” that makes them seem poorly adapted. As we will see, the average HSP actually tends to focus more on positive experiences than do non-HSPs.

Another way HSPs can seem neurotic to others is their being easily overaroused or overstimulated—these two are roughly the same. No one feels good or performs well when overaroused, but sensitive people need less to reach their optimal level and of course less to feel terrible and perform poorly, often just when they want to do their best. For example, speaking to a stranger at a noisy party can cause them to fall silent, unable to think of anything to say. They seem shy, but actually their brain is simply overwhelmed by having so much to absorb. They can still feel that they have failed, and non-HSPs might agree with that, and so an HSP might become truly anxious and shy (afraid of social judgment) the next time in a similar situation. All of that can certainly seem neurotic.

Finally, being more emotionally reactive can appear neurotic, because when there is a good reason, they do become more anxious, depressed, angry and so forth, while others are reacting less intensely. There is a good evolutionary reason for this. No one processes anything deeply without an emotional motivation. That is, their key trait, depth of processing, is necessarily driven by their emotional reactivity. You cannot have one without the other. They learn more from their experiences because after each experience they are more pleased or upset by the outcome and think more about the experience than others would

You can see the link between emotion and learning in the specific case of “overreacting” to criticism. Part of HSPs’ survival strategy is correcting their behavior when they have made a mistake. (Of course, again, an HSP could also truly overreact if he or she has been cruelly criticized in the past.) Anyone learns or corrects behavior when emotionally involved with the outcome. That is why educators tend to use grades to motivate learning. Most students are pleased with a good grade and upset by a poor one, making them work harder for the first outcome. HSPs are simply more efficient in this process. We hope our surgeon has been upset about past mistakes and learned from them!

I hope I making it very clear is that high sensitivity is not a disorder and most HSPs are quite normal, well adapted, and make wonderful partners. Yes, some have serious problems, including depression and anxiety, but you can see from the research that this is only under particular circumstances.

[Level A]The Latest Research and the Four Aspects of High Sensitivity

These four aspects-- depth of processing, being easily over aroused, emotional reactivity along with empathy, and sensing subtleties--are a useful way to think about high sensitivity. Hence a person without all four of these is probably not highly sensitive, at least as I have defined it. However, although I have divided the research this way, you will also be able to sense how much the four blend: There will be no depth of processing without strong emotions; processing experiences deeply naturally means perceiving the subtleties; and overarousal occurs sooner for HSPs when they have a great deal to process at once.

[level B]Depth of Processing

There is considerable new evidence about the depth-of-processing feature of high sensitivity. A study published in 2011 in *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* by Jadzia Jagiellowicz and colleagues compared the brain activity (using functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI) of HSPs and non-HSPs when they were trying to see the difference between two slightly varied pictures versus two obviously different pictures. When viewing the pictures with subtle differences, HSPs showed more brain activity in areas that do just that--consider the complexities and details in a perception, not simply the superficial aspects. That is, at least in this situation, HSP employed more those parts of the brain involved in "deeper" or more elaborate processing.

Another study, by ourselves and others, also published in *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, in 2010, compared how HSPs and non-HSPs born and raised in Asia or the U.S. handle perceptual tasks that are already known to vary in how difficult they are—that is, how much brain activation or effort is required--depending on whether your culture is more collective, as in Asia, or more individualistic, as in the U.S. The brain activity of non-HSPs showed the usual extra effort when doing the task that is more difficult for people from their culture, but the brains of HSPs, whether born in Asia or the U.S., did not show any difference in effort on the two tasks. It was as if they could easily see beyond their cultural perceptual bias to a deeper level of how things "really are."

Research by Bianca Acevedo and colleagues, published in *Brain and Behavior* in 2014, studied HSPs and non-HSPs on a task involving viewing photos of strangers and loved ones and found the same results as Jagiellowicz: Compared to the non-HSPs, during these tasks HSPs had more brain activation in areas that elaborate perceptual processing. Also, probably because of the nature of this task, they had more brain activity than others in an area called the insula, sometimes called the seat of consciousness

because it integrates moment to moment knowledge of inner states and emotions, bodily position, and outer events to produce what we are presently aware of.

[Level B]Easily Overstimulated

A person who is more aware of everything going on outside and inside plus processing it more thoroughly almost has to wear out mentally and therefore physically (the brain is part of the body) sooner than others. As for experimental evidence that HSPs are more easily overstimulated, Friederike Gerstenberg, in a study published in *Personality and Individual Differences* in 2012, compared sensitive and non-sensitive people on a tricky perceptual task--to decide as rapidly as possible whether or not a T turned in various ways was hidden among a great many Ls turned various ways on a computer screen. HSPs were faster and more accurate, but when asked about their stress level, they also reported being more stressed than others after doing the task. Was it due to the perceptual effort required or the emotional effect of being in the experiment? Whatever the reason, they were feeling stressed. Just as we say a piece of metal shows stress when it is overloaded, so do HSPs.

High sensitivity, however, is not *mainly* about being distressed by high levels of stimulation, such as noise, a cluttered room, or constant change. Sensory discomfort by itself, without other aspects of the trait, can be a sign of disorder due to *problems* with sensory processing—not being able to sort it out well--rather than having unusually *elaborate or deep* sensory processing. For example, sometimes persons with autistic spectrum disorders complain of sensory overload, but at other times they underreact to stimuli, especially social cues, as if they have trouble evaluating the significance of the stimulation.

[Level B] Emotional Reactivity and Empathy

We already knew from questionnaire studies and experiments that HSPs say that they react more to both positive and negative experiences, but a series of experiments and brain activation studies done by Jadzia Jagiellowicz for her doctoral dissertation (completed in 2012 at State University of New York, Stony Brook) found that HSPs react more than others both to pleasant (e.g., puppies, kittens, and birthday cakes) and unpleasant photos (e.g., snakes and spiders), but to pleasant ones especially, and especially if they had a good childhood. This reaction to positive pictures was not only in the brain areas associated with the initial experience of strong emotions, but also, again, in “higher” areas of thinking and perceiving, in some of the same areas as those found in the depth-of-processing brain studies.

Empathy, our emotional reaction specifically to what we think another is feeling, is obviously a highly useful characteristic in a close relationship. I already mentioned a brain study by Bianca Acevedo in which HSPs and non-HSPs looked at photos of the faces of both strangers and a romantic partners. You recall that HSPs showed more brain activity in the insula, the area associated with consciousness itself. This was true throughout this study as well, but even truer when looking at photos that showed emotions

on the faces of their partners, either happy or sad, compared to neutral expressions. That seemed to be an indication that they were in an especially heightened state of awareness at those times.

The HSPs also showed more activity than others in their mirror neuron system, especially when looking at the happy or sad faces of loved ones and the happy faces of strangers—another strong result for HSPs being especially attuned to those for whom they feel emotions and to positive images generally. The brain's mirror neurons were only discovered about twenty years ago. These neurons fire when we are watching someone else do or feel something, as if we were doing or feeling that same thing. For example, the mirror neurons are activated when we see someone kick a football, hear the sound of a ball being kicked, or even hear or say "kick." Other neurons keep us from acting as the other person is acting if we aren't supposed to, but it may not be perfect. If you have ever felt your muscles twitch when watching an athlete or dancer make a vigorous or exciting move, you have met your mirror neurons.

These astounding neurons not only help us learn through imitation, but along with other parts of the brain that were especially active for HSPs in this study, mirror neurons help us know deeply what the other person plans or feels. That is, these special areas of the brain lead to empathy. With mirror-neuron empathy we not only know from words and other cues how someone else feels, but actually feel that way ourselves to some degree. And again, HSPs had more brain activation in these areas that lead to empathy than the non-HSPs.

[Level B] Sensitive to Subtleties

Being aware of subtle sounds, smells, details, and so forth is all part of being highly sensitive, of course. Some people have a particular sense that is highly developed, but for the most part, again, it is not that the sense organs are more responsive, but the higher levels of thinking and feeling that attend to and make subtle discriminations. As for research on this point, there are of course the brain activation studies, especially the first, in which subjects looked for subtle differences between photos versus obvious differences and HSPs' brains were far more active than non-HSPs' when looking at subtle differences. Another example is the cultural study, in which the ease of perceiving a subtle difference was not affected by the HSP's culture, but it was for non-HSPs. There is also Gerstenberg's study, in which HSPs and non-HSPs had to pick out Ts turned in various ways that were hidden among many Ls turned various ways. HSPs were faster and more accurate.

[Level A] Genetic Evidence

We have always been almost certain that high sensitivity is innate, but now we know more about which genes are involved. Genes can have variations, such as those that produce different eye color. The gene determining the movement of serotonin throughout the brain is called the serotonin transporter gene, and has three variations—short-short, short-long, and long-long. In 2012 Cecilie Licht and others at

Center for Integrated Molecular Brain Imaging in Copenhagen reported that many or most HSPs carry one of the two short variations.

For years it was known that the short versions of this gene are associated with depression and various other emotional problems. But not consistently—people who are depressed usually carry these short variations, but people who had them were not necessarily depressed. In fact, some were unusually happy and emotionally well regulated. We now know that usually the short variations lead to depression only when an individual has had a stressful life history, especially in childhood.

This is a common genetic variation, found all over the world (more so in Asia) and therefore must serve some purpose beyond making people depressed. Finally researchers are looking for and finding benefits to having the short variations—for example, better decision making and gaining more from social support—pretty nice things to have in a partner.

Rhesus monkeys are perhaps the only other species that has this variation. Those with it were at first labeled “uptight” because they were easily stressed (think overstimulated and emotionally reactive), but when raised by skilled mothers they often rose to the top of the group hierarchy (think depth of processing and aware of subtleties). Interestingly both humans and rhesus monkeys are highly social and able to adapt to a wider range of environments than perhaps any other primate. One wonders if this adaptability is due to the highly sensitive members of a group being better able to notice the subtleties, such as which new foods can be safely eaten and which dangers to avoid, allowing them to survive better in a new place.

Not every HSP has this genetic variation in available serotonin. We think there are many genetic paths to high sensitivity. In 2011 Chunhui Chen and others working in China reported in *PLoS ONE* that they found variations in seven dopamine genes associated with high scores on the HSP Scale. There will certainly be other genes involved. Given the many new discoveries in the field of epigenetics—that is, how genes themselves are altered by environments—perhaps their other ways that a person can become highly sensitive in the womb or shortly after birth as an adaptation to the level of stress or support in the family environment. But I think sensitivity is *mostly* genetically determined directly because of another advance in the scientific evidence, the evolutionary reasons for high sensitivity.

[level A] Evolutionary Evidence

It becomes clearer and clearer that high sensitivity cannot be a disorder, problem, or consistent disadvantage given that it has evolved in over 100 other species besides ours. In all of these, the majority of members of the species are not sensitive to subtle aspects of their environment, but a minority of individuals are. In a paper published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in 2008, Max Wolf and his colleagues described a probable evolutionary explanation for sensitivity. It is based on a computer simulation and other evidence and reasoning. Wolf explained that sometimes it pays to notice

subtle details and process deeply your information about how the world works, comparing the situation now to all that you know about similar situations in the past. For example a grazing animal would benefit from noticing subtle differences in grasses if there were substantial differences in the nutritional quality of patches of grass. And sometimes all of that is just a waste of time, as when there is little variation in available grass, especially given there is an extra cost in having and using a nervous system that can perceive subtleties and make use of that knowledge later. Hence not everyone will be sensitive. In fact, most interestingly, sensitive individuals will *always* be a minority, because if everyone were sensitive, it would be no advantage to anyone to be. I like the example that if everyone in a traffic jam knows and takes an alternative route to get around it, that route becomes as crowded as any other. (I like this example because I am always finding secret alternate routes!)

[level A]It's Largely All or None

Yet another idea I raised early in this book and that is now better demonstrated is that sensitivity is not a dimension, like height or weight, with most people being in the middle. It is more like being right or left handed—all or nothing, with a majority being one way and a minority the other way. This was true for a trait that seemed similar to high sensitivity, inhibitedness in children, but now we have evidence for sensitivity itself, from a doctoral thesis completed in 2012 by Franziska Borries at the University of Bielefeld in Germany. In a study of over 900 people who took the HSP Scale and other measures (to compare how people answered various measures), she used a particular statistical method that distinguishes between categories and dimensions and found that sensitivity, unlike the other traits she measured, is indeed a category.

Of course no self-test is perfect. Many will score in the middle for reasons having nothing to do with the trait itself. For example, most highly sensitive men in the U.S. tend to score a bit lower (closer to the middle), and some people tend to answer everything towards the middle. In addition, sometimes scores are closer to the middle because of the moderating effect of another independent trait, such as the trait of high sensation seeking (discussed in this book). Everyone, after all, is unique.

One Last Study—HSPs and Boredom in Relationships

In 2010 my husband and I conducted a study that we have reported twice at conferences but is not yet written up for publication. We have always been interested in how much simply being bored with a relationship affects how satisfied partners are with the relationship. So we asked HSPs and non-HSPs how bored they were in their close relationships and found in two separate studies that HSPs were definitely more bored, even though in other ways they were as satisfied with their relationships as non-HSPs were. We did the same study with a third group, but asked whether, when they were bored, do they wished they could go out and do something new or exciting, or do they wish they have a deep conversation about something personally meaningful. Especially if HSPs also said that they like to reflect

on the meaning of their experiences (as most do), they almost always found the deep conversation was what they needed in order to end their boredom.

The bad news is that without deep conversations, HSPs are especially likely to be bored in their relationships, which is probably an issue more often when the other is not an HSP. The good news is that HSPs do not seem to allow that to detract from their satisfaction. Perhaps they are used to it. But it also suggests that both members of a relationship should think of how to deepen their conversations in order to bring more richness to the relationship, perhaps for both people.

New Old Thoughts on Love, HSPs, and Spirituality

In rereading this book, I was surprised to find how much I knew back when I wrote it, and how much of that I said in it. I was particularly pleased by what I wrote about the spiritual aspects of close relationships. (I am still glad I did not drop the spiritual material as one of the original editors of the book thought I should do. For many HSPs, spirituality seems to be central to our lives.) In a sense I have nothing more to say on the subject, except that it seems now that when I wrote it I did not really *know* it.

What I mean to say is that the spiritual side of relationships only becomes clearer and dearer to me as years pass. Perhaps it is my phase of life. But actually, I have always been a great believer in spiritual practices and experiences, not vague spiritual feelings or beliefs, and especially for HSPs. There are so many paths. We each find the ones right for us. But love is usually involved, isn't it?

I myself have been engaged in three practices. The first has been my marriage, although I did not always see it that way. I have been with my husband forty-seven years. We have passed the miserable conflict stage, the luxurious taking-it-for-granted times, and moved into deeper and deeper love, with an increasingly spiritual sense to it. I also feel more and more discrepancy between the way I want to be with him and the way I am each day, with all my moods. That, however, is part of the path. Meanwhile, we support each other's spiritual aspirations and see the future as an opportunity to do that much more. The early difficulties, and there were many, have all been worth it.

As I tried to make clear in this book, any close relationship has the potential to become a spiritual path. There are two resources not in this book, however, that might help some of you wanting to make this effort. (Both exist in several languages.) One is Guggenbuhl-Craig's, *Marriage Dead or Alive*, which is obviously specifically about marriage. His view is that if we marry, or tell people to marry, simply in order to be happy, the entire institution is going to fail. If we make marriage a way to develop our character, to enrich our soul, often through struggle, then it is very alive.

Another worthy author is Martin Buber. Some find his classic, *I-Thou*, rather difficult and prefer the easier relevant parts of *The Knowledge of Man* or *Between Man and Man*. Buber sees the potential for the depth of I-Thou (versus I-It) in every relationship, even those that are brief. To Buber, they can occur

with nature, with other humans of course, and with God. Indeed, he thought that with enough I-Thou moments with others, even an atheist would stumble upon the I-Thou with God.

In contrast to the difficulties inherent to close relationships, it has never been difficult for me to meditate, I think because I practice Transcendental Meditation, a truly effortless method. (Substantial research indicates that methods do vary in their effects on one's brain during meditation and one's mood and behavior afterwards.) I have gladly meditated twice a day for forty-three years, with many long retreats, and I now spend two hours a day at it. I have found that the promised "higher states of consciousness" are real, but develop only gradually over a long time. One of these higher states very naturally increases the depths of one's love on Buber's list: love for the beauty of nature; for those closest to you; and for whomever or whatever is, in your heart, the source of all of that. It is essential on the path to that higher state to have someone to love, although that comes easily when the time is right. The point is, the meditation path also involves others.

Third, throughout my adult life I have made use of the thoughts of Carl Jung on understanding one's "shadow," the sum of all of our complexes (I describe complexes in this book). When triggered, a complex causes us to stop respecting as separate people the ones we most love, but turn them into players on our inner stage. Whatever they are saying, at the moment it only seems to translate into the script our complex has provided, and we respond with lines like "You don't *really* love me," "I cannot live without you," or "You have failed me."

Although there are personal reasons why one or the other complex is most salient, when you work on them as long as I have, you see that these scripts turn out to be the instinctive self-protective complexes that we all use. How do you love when you know you will lose the other? When the other might fail you miserably? The answer too often is that we try not to love so much, and there are many ways to do that, usually unconscious. For example, "you don't really love me" can cover up, "I know you *do* really love me, and that frightens me." "I can't live without you" is closer to the final truth, but perhaps hides the fear of "What would it mean about our love if I *could* live without you?" "You have failed me" so often covers up, "I know I have failed you."

In short, the path of love often runs straight into a murky swamp, and Jung took our collective dark side very seriously, as do I. There are things wrong in our world right now that, up to now, human love is not fixing. We need to figure out much more about ourselves.

The shamans divide the world into three realms: The upper world, this "real" world, and the lower world. Familiarity with each is essential to their work of healing and helping. I see meditation as the path in the upper world; deepening my close relationships as my path in the "real" world; and grasping better and better the role of the archetypal, unconscious, shadow world of the human psyche, *my* psyche, as my path in the lower world. Although these days the teachers on each of these three paths

often leave out or even deride the other two, in the light of the shamans the three paths do not contradict, but complement each other, being part of one larger reality.

The above three paths are already threaded throughout this book, and no doubt you have your own unique threads running through your own life. What I want to emphasize is that at least some spiritual practices can develop into something awesome, stupendous, and completely worthwhile, but *over many years*. We are taught that you cannot start too young to invest financially for your retirement, but also that it is never too late to start. Above all, we should not stop our financial investing even when times get tough. But what kind of retirement will it be, really, at least for an HSP, if we are not also investing in something deeper? The teacher who gave me my meditation practice taught me to “ride the tiger” of aging. Whatever our age right now, we are all growing older. But if we also grow in a subtler and more spiritual way, the end result is much, much more than an old, dying body. My hope for you is that you are not merely an “HSP in love,” or an HSP who can skillfully give and receive love, but one traveling towards the final, fullest depths of love.