

I DO! I DO! THE MARRIAGE VOW WORKBOOK

Create inspiring marriage vows that will . . .
express your deepest feelings for one another,
increase your trust and connection,
and provide a strong foundation for your relationship,
now and in the years to come.

SHONNIE LAVENDER
& BRUCE MULKEY

I Do! I Do! The Marriage Vow Workbook

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To Tom and Sharon Parish, who during their eighteen-year marriage,
modeled profound love and steadfast commitment,
and who during Sharon's recent passing,
modeled undeniable grace and courageous letting go.

Sharon Parish passed from her mortal form at the age of forty-nine on May 31, 2006. To learn why we loved this remarkable woman so much, visit the weblog created by her husband and our cherished friend, Tom Parish: <http://sharonparish.typepad.com>.

I was on a train on a rainy day. The train was slowing down to pull into a station. For some reason, I became intent on watching the raindrops on the window. Two separate drops, pushed by the wind, merged into one for a moment and then divided again—each carrying with it a part of the other. Simply by that momentary touching, neither was what it had been before. And as each one went on to touch other raindrops, it shared not only itself, but what it had gleaned from the other.

~Peggy Tabor Millin

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TIPS ON STAYING TOGETHER

Make a list of things your partner likes and do one at least once a week.

Put a picture of both of you at your wedding where you can look at it often.

If you see a booger on your partner's nose, pick it off.

Learn to say "I'm sorry" and "Will you forgive me?"

Breathe, breathe, breathe.

Try to wear out your sense of humor.

Don't say anything rude about your partner's mother.

Don't go to sleep with your backs to each other.

Keep in mind: you are each other's mirror.

Have fun; life is short.

~Tom & Sharon Parish presented this wisdom to the authors as a wedding gift in July 1999.

Praise for *I Do! I Do! The Marriage Vow Workbook*

This creative workbook will be valuable to any couple planning their marriage or re-commitment. Furthermore, the post-ceremony guidance will help them transform their wedding into their marriage. I highly recommend it.

~Harville Hendrix, Ph.D., author of *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*
and cocreator of Imago Relationship Therapy

During the magical ceremonies we call weddings, we recite vows with passion and proclaim our love to the world. Yet we may not always LIVE these words with the same passion for the rest of our married lives.

When Bruce and Shonnie chose to become married, they made conscious choices about their wedding weekend, their marriage vows, and how they would live their lives based on their souls' commitments to one another. In doing so, they created a loving, fulfilling, and enduring relationship in which they are LIVING their vows—encouraging each other to live boldly, authentically, compassionately, and courageously. In I Do! I Do! The Marriage Vow Workbook, they offer their lived wisdom to couples who wish to follow a similar path.

My work is to help people see the sacredness in all relationships—especially in business—and this is what the workbook that Shonnie and Bruce have created does so brilliantly for couples. Not only will The Marriage Vow Workbook empower couples to write vows that express the love they share, it will awaken them to a more mindful, connected, and authentic way of being together . . . now and for all their days.

~Lance Secretan, Ph.D., award-winning author (*ONE: The Art and Practice of Conscious Leadership*), speaker, coach, and advisor to leaders

As a psychologist who works with couples, I intend to use I Do! I Do! The Marriage Vow Workbook with my clients who are about to get married and also with those in couples therapy. Often folks in a relationship are unhappy because they have gotten off course or drifted from their initial vision for living together joyfully. They begin looking for a way out or for a way back to the magic that once held them together in a sacred commitment. Whether couples want to create a commitment or make a re-commitment, it takes a thoughtful, step-by-step process that looks exactly like the one so beautifully designed and guided by Shonnie and Bruce in The Marriage Vow Workbook.

~John E. Hoover, Ph.D., psychologist

"YES, YES!" is our response to I Do! I Do! The Marriage Vow Workbook by Mulkey and Lavender. Anticipating that this workbook was for persons who intended to get married some time in the future, we started our review of it through the eyes of a married couple of some years. We really did not expect to find help for our already committed relationship. But that changed in a matter of minutes! By the time we finished the exercise at the end of Chapter 3, we realized our assumptions about the workbook were shortsighted. As we continued to evaluate the chapters and exercises, we found ourselves saying, "We should try this exercise or that ritual. We wrote our own marriage vows years ago, but how long has it been since we've looked at them? Do we even know where they are?" When we completed our review of the workbook, we embraced its insights for our relationship.

What we discovered in I Do! I Do! is a thought-provoking and uncompromising message for couples who want to create a conscious, committed relationship. Whether marriage is in the future, has already happened, or may never happen, this workbook is a means to move relationships more toward the good for which we all yearn.

*~Helen Bruch Pearson, Candler School of Theology, Emory University (Ret.)
and Luther E. Smith, Jr., Ph.D., Professor of Church and Community,
Candler School of Theology, Emory University*

Shonnie and Bruce have truly created this workbook out of their own powerful and inspiring relationship. I Do! I Do! The Marriage Vow Workbook is a must-do for thoughtful couples who want to prepare well for a marriage that will last a lifetime.

~Ken and Elizabeth Loyd Kinnett, founders of Back to Bliss™ Relationship Workshops

This workbook should be required reading for any couple contemplating marriage, for the probing and insightful questions are best explored with a partner far in advance of the wedding day. The information gleaned could prove priceless.

*~Paul Howey, author of Freckles: The Mystery of the Little White Dog in the Desert,
winner of the ASPCA Henry Bergh Children's Book Award*

Thank you so much for creating this workbook. Using it to write our marriage vows has been a wonderful experience for us. Not only has it helped us to produce vows that really fit, it has encouraged us to consciously address some issues in our relationship as well as develop a compelling vision for our future. We're both deeply grateful for your work.

~Allison Jordan and Gil Holmes

The Marriage Vow Workbook *is a spiritual tool for creating joyful and loving marriages which, in turn, promote peace in the world. As Confucius said:*

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.

If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

We give this useful and transformative workbook five stars and recommend it highly to all who embark on this sacred journey.

~Mary Page Sims and The Rt. Rev. Bennett J. Sims, Bishop of the
Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, 1971-1983

As a minister who officiates at seventy to eighty weddings each year, and as one who truly believes in committed love, I know how helpful this book will be. First-time marriages or second- and third-time-arounders will find this guide wonderfully helpful in designing just the right words for celebrating their love. A big Yes! to Mulkey and Lavender for enhancing one of the most powerful and important experiences a couple can have together.

~Rev. Howard Hanger, Founder and Minister of Ritual & Celebration,
Jubilee! Community Church, Asheville, NC

Couples who engage this book fully will come out of the process knowing their partners, themselves, and their relationship more deeply. The questions posed here, the context offered, and the stories shared will do nothing less than enrich their lives. Bruce and Shonnie offer hard-won wisdom, encouragement, and guidance that we haven't found anywhere else. This is a generous book.

~Deanna LaMotte and David LaMotte, singer-songwriter and author of *S.S. Bathtub*, a book for children based on his song of the same name

Love is in constant potential and sometimes the mind is the last to know. But the heart may sense from across the room, from across worlds, that the beloved is approaching and the journey of another lifetime is about to begin.

~Stephen and Ondrea Levine

Acknowledgments

One hot Austin, Texas summer in 1995, events conspired to bring the two of us together. Though totally unaware of one another's existence, we serendipitously joined a marathon training program—Austin Fit. Based on a time trial, we both were placed in the intermediate runners, a group composed of approximately thirty runners. As our group's numbers dwindled in the months preceding the race, a handful of us continued to train together at Lake Austin every Saturday morning, completing the Austin Motorola Marathon together in February 1996. And though the remaining members of our group sometimes went out for pancakes at the Magnolia Café after our weekly runs, we typically didn't see each other outside our workouts. So one Saturday we made plans to go out for music and a few beers. When the appointed time arrived, however, only two runners showed up—us (Shonnie and Bruce). And the rest, as they say, is history. We're grateful to the universe for the intersection of our paths. And we're grateful to our running buddies—Jesús, Tim, Jack, Tall Bald Larry, and Medium Bald Larry—who reneged on our planned get-together, giving us that evening all to ourselves.

I (Bruce) want to acknowledge Brad Brown and Roy Whitten, founders of the Kairos Foundation and the More To Life Program. It is through this work that I gained a sense of who I really am and my purpose in life. In addition, Shonnie and I have both benefited immensely from the relationship and sexuality workshops that this program offers. I also thank the women of my two previous marriages, both of whom helped me to learn more about myself and how to live in partnership with a significant other. My time with each of them included periods of profound love and connection along with periods of significant challenge, experiences that helped me realize that there is no one to blame, that I, and no one else, am responsible for my happiness and what I choose to make of my life.

I (Shonnie) am thankful to have had exposure to a wealth of loving relationships throughout my life. Though there were painful parts of my parents' divorce and remarriages, I learned how to open my heart to new family members while remaining faithful to my original family; find a way to move from conflict to togetherness; and be creative and flexible in building relationships that worked best for everyone involved. My early life and earlier loves enabled me to become who I am today. It is my hope that this book serves as a legacy to these people who modeled true love and helped instill in me a desire to do what's necessary to create loving, lasting, and deeply fulfilling relationships.

We want to give thanks to the folks who helped us put *I Do! I Do! The Marriage Vow Workbook* into its final form: David Lynch, Lynch Graphics, for the beautiful workbook cover design; Steve Mann, Black Box Photography, for the author photographs that

capture our essence; Susan Snowden, Snowden Editorial Services, for masterfully editing the workbook in its entirety; and Heidi Costas, Workbook Goddess, for her innovative teleclass on creating workbooks that provided the initial spark for this project.

We also want to acknowledge all of those who provided us with feedback on this workbook, including Lance Secretan, Helen Bruch Pearson and Luther Smith, Allison Jordan and Gil Holmes, Ken and Elizabeth Loyd Kinnett, Howard Hanger, Bennett and Mary Page Sims, Paul Howey, David and Deanna LaMotte, Carolyn Baehr, Laurey Masterton, Sharon Parish, Fran Henry, Stewart Stokes, Barbara Brady, Jan Marie Dore, Randy Siegel, Bob and Deb Lavender, Elizabeth Pavka, Wendy Watkins, Jenny Meadows, and many others.

Finally, a special thanks to Harville Hendrix and John Hoover, who offered numerous valuable suggestions to make the workbook a more effective resource for couples who choose to use it. Their powerful support helped make this project a reality.

*If the only prayer you said in
your whole life was, "thank
you," that would suffice.*

~Meister Eckhardt

Introduction

Welcome to *I Do! I Do! The Marriage Vow Workbook*. The fact that you are reading these words right now is no coincidence. You came upon this workbook because you have an intention to create a joyful and fulfilling life for yourself and a loving and lasting relationship with your partner. Be assured that you are right where you're supposed to be, doing exactly what you're supposed to be doing at this moment in time.

Some couples regard their vows as just another component of the wedding celebration, along with the bridesmaids' dresses, music selections, and reception seating. In such instances, the vows are often merely words, albeit pretty ones, to be memorized and spoken once on the special day, then likely forgotten. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But this workbook is not for them.

*There are no accidents
whatsoever in the universe.*

~Ram Dass

This workbook is for you and your partner . . . to help you create evocative and meaningful marriage vows that will serve you not only during the marriage ceremony itself but throughout your lives together. Whether you and your partner are conservative or liberal, whether you're straight or gay, whether this is your first marriage or you've been married previously, whether you're religious or not, you can use this workbook to create a powerful and enduring relationship.

What you'll gain from this process

As a result of reading this workbook, completing the exercises, sharing your work with your partner, and writing your marriage vows, we believe you will create a strong foundation for your relationship and enhance it in ways that you might not have imagined. In fact, working through the exercises in *The Marriage Vow Workbook* will empower you to:

- Awaken to the deepest reasons for joining your lives in marriage
- Envision what you want most from your life together
- Initiate a ritual to sustain your marriage for many years to come
- Create a loving, committed partnership that's truly ideal for both of you

The experience that led us to write this workbook

Over the years, friends and strangers alike have remarked on how we are with one another—the love we openly express, the respect that we exhibit, our ability to promptly resolve difficulties as they occur, our willingness to ask for and offer forgive-

Marriage is a psychological and spiritual journey that begins in the ecstasy of attraction, meanders through a rocky stretch of self-discovery, and culminates in the creation of an intimate, joyful, lifelong union.

~Harville Hendrix

ness. Probably the most important thing we did to build our fulfilling life together was to consciously create our marriage vows, the commitments we made to one another on our wedding day that we have continued to abide by. In our vow-writing process, we took the opportunity to go deep, individually and together, to gain a greater sense of who we were, why we were together, and where we wanted to go. Out of

this experience, we wrote vows that brought us closer from the first instant we recited them to one another.

In the years since our wedding day, we have revisited our vows on a regular basis to remind ourselves of our intentions and to return to integrity with our commitments when we've strayed. We know that we've benefited immensely from this process, and we believe that you will too.

One more thing

One of our highest intentions is to help create a world of greater compassion and connection, and this workbook was formed out of this calling. Now, by crafting your wedding vows and living them with purpose, you will be sending your love into the universe. When you take the time to open your hearts, write your truths, and share your authentic selves with one another as well as those around you, you'll not only be creating a loving, lasting marriage; you truly will, as Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

We both wish you all the best, from this day forward.

Shonnie Lavender & Bruce Mulkey

Chapter 1: How to use this workbook

As you will likely discern as you read and complete the exercises in this workbook, the process you are about to undertake concerns more than just writing your marriage vows. Of course this work involves writing words of commitment for your wedding day. But more than that, there is an underlying intention to help you to form the foundation on which you can build a loving, fulfilling, lifelong relationship together. Some of the responses you provide in the exercises will be woven into your vows, while others will serve to connect you, lighten your heart, broaden your vision, and open your eyes even further to the amazing gifts you have the opportunity to share with one another.

You are welcome to use this workbook in any manner that fits best for you. To get the most from the process, however, we encourage you to create an agreement about how you will be with one another as you work through the exercises and create your marriage vows. Below are some of our recommendations.

Recommendations for completing the exercises

- Agree to fully engage in the process of creating your marriage vows and to respect one another while doing so.
- Create a supportive environment. Set aside time that will be uninterrupted and quiet so you can give your full attention to reading and completing the exercises.
- Ritualize your experience. This can be as simple as lighting a candle and putting on some relaxing music before you begin, or as elaborate as you can imagine.
- Enjoy yourself and have fun. If your mind starts to wander or you find yourself resisting this endeavor, stop for a while. Take a break. Return to the process later.
- Be gentle with yourself. If you tend to be a perfectionist or believe you must write elegant prose, give yourself permission to simply pour out your words onto paper. You can edit and rewrite later.
- Allow yourself as much time as you need to work through each exercise and for reflection afterwards.
- Work separately and together. First complete the exercises in each chapter on your own. By doing so you will forego the temptation to be influenced by your partner's responses. At the end of each chapter, come together and share your responses. Then proceed to the exercises in the next chapter.

*I love you, not only
for what you are, but
for what I am when I
am with you.*

~Roy Croft

- Write your responses to the exercises in the space provided with each exercise. Ideally each partner will work in his/her own workbook. However, your or your partner's responses may also be written on the worksheets at the back of this workbook or in a journal or other personal notebook. Choose the method that works best for you.
- Be completely honest with yourself and your partner. Being truthful is a vital component of all enduring relationships. Some of the exercises may prompt a conversation with your partner or some deep reflection of your own.
- Acknowledge your differences clearly and openly. Knowing how you are different from your partner is just as important as knowing how you are similar.
- Listen deeply to one another as you share this process. Listen without interrupting so you can give your partner the space to be fully heard.
- Open your heart. Your vows are already within you. You know how you want to be with your partner, what you want to create. Allow your open heart to pour forth words without self-censorship or concern about the criticism of others.
- Use language that seems natural to you. And, if you come upon a word or phrase in this workbook that feels awkward or doesn't fit your sensibilities, change it to one you prefer and move on.
- Give yourself permission to be bold. These are your vows; this is your marriage. If a particular thought or phrase truly matters to you, don't hesitate to include it.
- Take full responsibility for your experience. If there is something you want or there is something that's not working for you during the process of writing your vows, handle it and/or let your partner know without blaming or criticizing.
- Develop an agreement about your intention to get back on track if you and/or your partner get "stuck" during this process.

What to do if you get stuck

It's possible that you and your partner will encounter some stumbling blocks or challenges as you work through the exercises in this book. Signals that you have gotten off course include:

- Resistance to the process, e.g., becoming bored, distracted, confused, anxious, frustrated, critical, or angry

*When you are for me as
much as you are for yourself,
and I am for you as much as I
am for myself, we will start
to understand the meaning of
our relationship.*

~Brad Brown