



Conscious Life presents  
**HEALING TOXIC  
RELATIONSHIPS**

## **The Power of Wonder**

**Guest: Dr Harville Hendrix and Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

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### **[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson**

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. I love speaking with experts who have been in the trenches with us, and Dr Harville Hendrix and Dr Helen Lakelly Hunt fit this description perfectly.

They come by their expertise through both learning and experience. When their own relationship was in jeopardy, they co-created Imago Relationship Therapy to build relationship culture that supports universal equality. Their work teaches us how to embrace difference, diffuse conflict, and move past problems into empathy. They even reveal the single feature of thriving couples. Enjoy.

Harville and Helen, thank you so much for being with me today.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

Thank you very much, Meagen, for having us. We're delighted to be here.

### **Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Yes.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I think there might be a common misconception that people who work in therapeutic fields or in personal development don't have problems. I would love it if you could tell me about your marriage, any personal struggles you've had and how you've overcome them.

Helen's going to respond to that, but I just had a thought. Most of us who go into the mental health field went into it because we had problems, but instead of going and getting our problems fixed, we decided that we would compensate by helping other people with their problems. But then the turkey comes home to roost eventually.

### **Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Are you calling me a turkey?

**[00:01:44] Dr Harville Hendrix**

Or the chicken or the eagle.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

You're a turkey, too. Okay.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

At some point, you have to face your denial. The place that it shows up, will always show up, is in your marriage. You just can't get away from it. We know all about that and Helen's going to talk about it.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

We do big presentations and weekend workshops Friday night, all day, Saturday and Sunday. Harville has given me permission to talk about our story in these workshops. Basically, it's how we succeeded and then we weren't succeeding. When Harville and I met, both of us had divorced, and we were both deeply committed to family, and we were going, why are we divorced?

Harville, in particular, was struggling with that issue and beginning to come up with solutions. I just fell in love with what Harville was wanting to do with his life. He began to create stages of relationship. There's romance, and guess what? It feels great. Guess what? That's stage one because after romantic attraction, everyone goes into stage two, which is the power struggle. Ouch, I made a mistake. Guess what? With a few simple things, everyone can reach stage three, real love.

We began to dialog. Well, how do you get to stage three because we're dating and we're fighting a lot? Harville says publicly, Helen and I were in a huge fight, and she said, stop, one of us talk and listen. And then, of course, Harville was brilliant about many things, as we co-created the theory.

I proposed. My first husband talked me into getting married, and I said, I'm going to propose to the next guy. What was the year? We had dated for five years, and then I proposed. What year did I propose?

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

I think you proposed in '81, and we married a year later in '82.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Okay.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Yeah.

**[00:04:18] Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

We were dating for five years before that, working out the theory.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

With clear instructions to me to not even consider proposing.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Oh, yeah.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

The answer would be no if I did it. I'm waiting for five years and in separate cities as well for her to make up her mind.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

We were thrilled. After we married, we found the best agent, and she got us the best publisher, and the best book five years later had been written. When it came out oh, my goodness, six weeks later. Harville wanted my name on the cover and I said, there are some reasons.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Well, it belonged on the cover, you were a co-creator of the book.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

He's a sharecropper's son from South Georgia and I had a better known last name. I said just your name, but I picked up the phone six weeks after the book came out, and it was the Oprah Winfrey Studio. They wanted him on the show. Oprah submitted it to the Emmy committee, and that show won Oprah her first Emmy. Ta-da, a success. Everything was so exciting as Imago Therapy was getting birthed, except I was constantly trying to improve Harville. That was the skill of mine.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

She was good at it.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

I tell in our workshops, I was just constantly - his wardrobe needed to be improved. Parenting needed to be improved. This needed to be improved. You know what? It was true.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Yeah, it's true.

**[00:06:03] Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

I don't need to be the one to tell him. But anyway, I would tell him. I'd ask him to go out on a date, and he didn't want to go on a date. Oh, dear. We did not have a happy marriage, and there was chaos at home. I dragged him to therapy. The therapists, we didn't like any of them because we were smarter than them and we kept firing them. And then the last one said we were the couple from hell, and she fired us. We had no recourse but to go to a divorce lawyer.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

At this point, the book had become visible enough that I was the most visible couples therapist probably at that time on the planet because of the Oprah shows. We are in couples therapy, and the therapist says that she won't work with us. You all are just impossible. You're the couple from hell. I think that's an amazing part of this story.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

She kicked us out of her office. We saw a divorce lawyer. We announced to our family we were divorcing and to the whole Imago community we were divorcing. Oh, by the way and then Harville, his role in what wasn't working is when I would ask Harville if we could bring dialog with our family.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Yeah, you wanted us to use the process we created.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Or use it between us. He said, Helen, I teach this stuff, I don't do it.

We weren't doing it and so we were divorcing. But then we tinkered with the process and when we added a little bit more theory to what makes a healthy relationship, it worked. We announced to everyone we knew that we were going to have a recommitment ceremony and have a banquet.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

That was 1999, the end of the last, what do you call it? Century.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Yeah.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

New Year's Eve, 1999.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

What was the worst experience in my life, a second divorce, is really such a happy one now because no relationship is hopeless. That's what we get to tell people.

**[00:08:35] Dr Harville Hendrix**

We do say that if people say, is there a time when you should quit? The answer is, yeah, there are some things you should quit, but not your relationship. There's some things you need to start so that you can stay. If you don't do those things, and we've worked on this now for, I think, the refining process, because we had some global things for about the first ten years and then the last 20 years we've refined, refined, refined.

We think that we've arrived at, and this may sound arrogant, some behaviors, not just abstract principles, but some behaviors that if you do them, you can't lose, and if you don't do them, you will lose. It's just that simple. I use the analogy of exercise. Do I want a healthy body or not? Well, if you do, you don't have to go to the gym, but you have to exercise. I will not go and have an exercise coach because I don't want anybody telling me what to do. I'll go learn what to do and read the books and see the graphs and the charts and all that.

But mainly you have to move, walk 30 minutes a day and then do some muscle stretching and so forth and eat well and you'll be fine. You don't have to become an athlete, but there are some things you have to do to have a healthy body. You make a decision and it will be unnatural for you to do that, and that means you're doing the right thing.

If it feels unnatural, it's probably the right thing to do. That's hard for people to take because they think relationships should be natural, that we be in relationship with another person and none of us do. Everything we do with another person has been learned at our mother and father's knees, and they learned it from theirs, and they learned the wrong lessons, and they passed them down to us.

And then we are adults, and we think that's reality. Turns out that it's actually just the way you were shaped, and therefore you're empowered by the awareness that you can actually reshape your life at its fundamental level, and that it's really simple.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

I'm going to say something, and then we'll let you talk.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, of course.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Harville's genius is simplifying the complex.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

That's because I'm simple.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

So many people, they're trying to figure out relationship, and I shared ideas with him, but then he puts it in a structure that creates safety between two people. It's a simple thing to learn.

### **[00:11:24] Meagen Gibson**

I want to talk about those practices and that structure. I want to loop back to something you said earlier, though, for just a second, which is that what you went through and experienced is so relatable. How many people do I know that are in the healthcare profession but that don't eat right or don't exercise? A lot of us know the right things to do through experience or through education or through our practice professionally, but struggle so much to apply those principles that we know work to our own lives.

How brave and gracious of you to, and I guess you didn't have a choice at that point, but to do the self-experimentation and do the tough work of reflecting on the only thing that was left, which was your own work and figure out if it was really going to apply to your situation. If it was going to be able to salvage your relationship and how you could move forward with it, and even strengthen all of those practices and principles which I'd love to hear more about now.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

Well, let me start with the problem that all couples have, and which we discovered is the problem all human beings have. Couples are just a subset of the human family, of the human situation. After getting it wrong for about ten years in our research on the question why do couples fight? That was what started our conversation in 1977 when we first met, was why are we divorced? I'm a university professor at that time, and I'm also a registered clinician, and I have a practice, and I teach. Helen had her own wonderful life and her own wonderful career, and we were wondering is there something wrong with us?

Why are we divorced? That led to, well, why does anybody get a divorce? And that led to, well, why do couples fight? And that led ultimately to why does anybody fight? We finally arrived after years of throwing away wrong answers that didn't add up to one simple answer. This is where Helen says, my brain seems to have a filtering process and finally says here it is, and it's objection to difference.

We grow up, and in our marriages, we assume that and we live all our lives, assuming that we know what reality is, but we don't know that what we mean by that is our reality, but our reality is the reality. And so we marry somebody who has the same mental brain processes that we did, except they created a different world. You get married, you surrender that and interact with the things where they overlap.

You don't notice some of the edges where you really are very different and see things differently or like to do different things. I like to travel, Helen likes to stay home, but we did a lot of moving around when we were dating and courting. But you discover at some point that when your partner talks, you have this reaction, and you want to correct them. And then when you correct them, then they counter-correct you, and then you counter-correct them.

When you look at all of that, it looks like you're just having a fight. You should learn how to fight better. Well, yeah, but the problem is you can't accept difference. Your partner is different from your picture of your partner. Your partner's world is different from your world. They like different things, and they see things differently. Helen and I have a chronic thing about temperature.

Helen likes warmer rooms. I like colder rooms. What do you do about that? Well, you sneak around and turn the temperature up or down to make yourself comfortable or you agree on, well, we can

both live at 72 or 78 or something like that. You have to, in other words, move into a collaboration. But the objection to difference and when you see that now, globally, it's the difference between the Republican and the Democrat, the difference between the Protestant and the Catholic.

**[00:16:05]**

Everything's going on there is you're not how I see the world. You don't see the world the way I see it. Therefore, I have to defend myself against you, and I have to convince you to see the world my way. Well, you can see how that's a source of conflict. If you push that hard enough, you will move into something intense like violence, and internationally, you'll move into war.

The question is, what do you do about difference since difference itself is not going to go away? Every flower is different. Every particle in the subatomic world is different from every other particle. Every woman is different from all other women. You're different from all other men. Difference is the nature of nature.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

May I share a favorite quote of his?

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Sure.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Harville said incompatibility is the grounds for marriage. And then in talking about difference, just to say nature, hot, cold, light, dark, sweet, sour, up, down. They're different. Nature is dyadic and couplehood is dyadic so back to Harville.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

That polarity of yes and no is built into nature. The particle wave duality in quantum physics, it's just there. That is not going away. Every human being on the planet is faced with that dilemma. What am I going to do with the fact that I'm not the center of reality? Well, you have to come to terms with that. The way you come to terms with it is to become, rather than reactive and judgmental and critical, to become curious about what is your partner's world.

When you get your partner's world and get what they think and feel and how they've suffered and so forth, you become curious and then empathic. You accept. That's how it is for you. That's what it was like for you as a child. That must have really hurt. You accept that this is your partner's world.

When they behave in ways that make you go crazy, you have to be empathic with the fact that they're dealing with a memory that was triggered in your relationship. You didn't intend to trigger it, you just were there. The way you were there, like not being present to in some way, triggered a memory of long ago. You can't even trace the memory, but long ago, your caretaker didn't look at you when you called them, and you couldn't get their attention no matter how loud you cried.

**[00:18:53]**

So that's back there, and you'd have to work really hard in therapy to get that memory back up there, but it's there. So, you know, you can just always assume that any reactivity is rooted in the activation of a painful memory. You can be empathic about that. We developed a process we call Imago, the Imago Dialogue process. Helen basically accidentally, I think it was accidentally, but nevertheless, it became a strategy, invented dialogue in the middle of one of our early fights in 1977, before we got married. Long before you proposed to me.

### **Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Yeah, I should have.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

She yelled out, hey, why don't we stop and one of us talk, and one of us listen, and then the other one talk, and the other one listen. Well, I'm in practice at this time as a couple's therapist, but I'm not doing that kind of therapy. I'm doing problem-solving, conflict resolution. What's it like for you, and can you all work on the temperature and negotiate, move from transaction to negotiation?

Never worked with couples. About 40% success rate. But I started doing what Helen invited us to do, which worked in our relationship and with the couples. You talk, and George is going to listen, and I have to train him to listen and shut up and really hold what Mary said and then vice versa.

Their relationships began to change in front of me, not because they solved a problem, but because they began to talk to each other differently. Then we discovered it's process for God's sakes, it's not content that matters. It's the quality of the interactive space. That evolved into a full developed dialogue process that had mirroring and then validation and empathy as the things that you do with each other whenever you talk.

Difference doesn't go away, but you collaborate around your differences using the structure so that then you can create a way to live together that is good for both of you. But difference won't go away. It's just you live now without judging difference, you begin to celebrate difference. My goodness. Things I objected to in Helen are her strongest traits.

She's so creative and entrepreneurial with her right brain. Sometimes I think I have no idea what you're talking about. You're all over the place, but something brilliant is going on. Most of the good ideas in Imago came from Helen's intuitions. I'm the left brain. I say, hey, so say more about that. All of a sudden, I'm aware she's found a block, a brick. I take this brick and build it, and it becomes a whole structure in the theory.

We then take that to the clinic and work with couples, and it works, and we do it in our own relationship. You become co-creative partners in the project of building your own marriage. We became co-creators in the project of building an intellectual system, a therapy system that's now in 61 countries, 2,700 people have been trained, and we have a faculty of 40 people teaching it.

That's because we kept working with this until the dialogue process became operational. It's the only thing that the Imago therapists use in their therapy. They don't do problem solving and content-focused stuff. Talk about anything you want to, but you talk about it this way, dialogically.



**[00:22:44] Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

To each other as a couple. The therapist doesn't have the answer. The couple has the answer. They put them together, and you listen to each other and problem solve.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

You sit like this and face each other. Rather than looking at the therapist, you face each other, and the therapist says, okay, talk. Here's a sentence stem. Start with this sentence stem. An appreciation I have for you is or a frustration I have with you is and then the therapist helps them use language in such a way that they don't hurt each other, but that they can connect with each other.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

It's all about slowing down and listening. We are rewarded when we talk well.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

That's such a great sentence.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

But what about Meagen, do you have other questions?

**Meagen Gibson**

Oh, you guys are doing fantastic. I don't feel like you're running me over at all. I love what you said about the memory triggers when we're listening to someone. That system that our brain develops to listen for those ways that our needs were not met, that has a purpose in our life to protect us. It's just that once we become adults and we're not under threat anymore, that system is no longer useful in our intimate relationships, where there is safety and there is trust, and those things are all steady and secure.

This process, and if I understand you correctly, that's what this therapist is doing is really setting the container for the process, not actually moderating the conversation between the two people. It's here's how we're going to speak to one another. Training people how to listen, I think would be a huge part of that as well.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Oh, yes.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Listen and also wonder. We are rewarded when we know stuff. If I were to say one more thing about what we do is we help people develop healthy brains, which makes them feel good. Because of the structure of the Imago process, there are sentence stems. Well, first you take turns talking and you ask for an appointment. Is now a good time to talk about so and so? If the person says, I'm busy, but how about in an hour and then I can give you my attention. Okay, let's do this in an hour.

**[00:25:15]**

There is structure to it and that person is the sender and the other person is the receiver. And then the receiver can set up another time to share with the sender their thoughts. But it's structure, structure, structure. The lower brain reacts if something's dangerous. It can react in a positive way, but it spontaneously reacts in a negative way that you can't control. It's just automatic.

The upper brain, the neocortex, which you can go to when you have sentence stems, is a much more calming part of the brain. And the sentence stems of the Imago Dialogue process, or we call it also the safe conversations dialogue process, takes you to the upper brain, left brain, knowing where you mirror someone back. Did I get it? And then, is there more about that?

It's like right brain, connect the dots or I imagine you're feeling and then is there more about that? This center of the brain, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, that releases the neurochemicals of calm, opposed to if you're scared, you don't feel safe being with someone, get anxious and you want to leave, or you want them to change and you insist that they change. They have to. That kind of thing is cortisol and adrenaline.

That's toxic neurochemicals as opposed to the wondering. Tell me why you think that. I don't agree with you, but I want to understand more about why you vote in the political party that you're interested in.

Wondering is the healthiest part of a brain. Noted neuroscientists say it promotes neural integration. It's the Dalai Lama state when you're meditating and you don't know stuff. I love living in that part of the brain. I don't talk anymore with Harville. Hardly. Not nearly as much as I used to. I have learned to wonder about him, and it is fun. It's a great brain state. We try to teach our couples to get a brain book and learn about having a healthy brain.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

Now, Helen says this very casually, but this is an example of Helen saying something very casually and at first, I don't get. What is this wonder business? That's for artists to wonder or children, but then she goes into these details about the brain. But behind what she's saying is a fundamentally profound reality, which is all of us do what we call predication.

Predication is we have to label things. We have to put labels on them. Psychology is really bad at this. We now have 365 different ways you can be crazy and 268 therapies to help you fix your craziness. Well, you know, when you look at that field, it's a dysfunctional field.

### **Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

The DSM-5 Statistical Manual.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

Underneath those 365, quote diagnoses, there's one problem, anxiety triggered by the lack of safety with no skills to engage in positive social engagement. All therapies, although they don't know they're doing it ultimately, intuitively, even no matter how elaborate the therapies are are

trying to get people to relate to each other with kindness or warmth. But they go through a long diagnostic process.

**[00:29:45]**

Then let's explore your child and I used to do this, and Helen used to do this. Boy, those childhood memories are so interesting. Got another one. We didn't notice that the people were not changing with what they remembered. They just remembered more trauma. But change came when their partner said something and they wanted to say, what in the hell are you talking about?

They instead would say, let me see if I'm getting that. You thought this about that? Am I getting it? So is there more about. See, so there's no predication or judgment here. This curiosity. This is the most recent thing that Helen's brought to the table is this concept of not knowing, which is the only way you allow your partner to be free from the prison in which you put them by thinking you knew them and that they were this way.

You're narcissistic or you're depressive affect or you're obsessive. All those words are abusive. Your partner is just doing something, and you put it in boxes because you can control it that way. Because if a person is obsessive, then you know what obsessive people do.

The brain likes to do that, but what our own brain doesn't know is we've made it more dangerous now because we put her in a box. Now, she's not behaving like she should in our box, even though it's a bad box. So we have to put her back in that box. Am I making sense?

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

Not to know and to say, oh, so that's going on for you. Can you tell me more that's going on for you? I can see how you're seeing it that way, and it's interesting that you are, and I really want to know how I can be helpful in your world with you. Now, what is she going to do? She's going to stop defending. She's going to stop whatever it is she was doing that triggered me because she didn't have to anymore, because I'm not constellating that response in her.

If I'm present to her and not judgmental about what I'm present to, then she has no reason to react or act out. Like the kids in the families, if you're there with the kid, they don't have to rebel, but if you're not there with the kids, they're going to rebel and they're going to go two ways, anger or depression. You can count on it.

Nearly half the adolescents in the world are angry. The other half are depressed. The ones who get the anger stuff wind up many of them in courts and prisons. The ones that are depressed wind up with therapies and in treatment centers. All because the parents are not available to the child's experience of itself.

They want to tell the child how to be, and the child knows that's not the way I am. That's not the way life is. Life is something else. Life is free and joyful. Life is fun. Life is blowing. Life is playing. Children know how to live. They play. In the field of mental health, the recent research on all of this

is that the single feature of a thriving couple is their capacity to engage in what? Spontaneous play, which means, like children.

**[00:33:22]**

It's interesting, Helen and I have been watching Jesus movies recently, and so interesting how Jesus made it really clear that the little children know about the Kingdom of God. You adults miss it because you got all these rules, but the children live there. In fact, he even said that, except you become as a little child, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.

We would say, unless you learn how to play together, you can't have a great marriage, but you have to learn how to do it spontaneously, because that means you're safe enough to initiate the play. You can structure play like, well, we're angry at each other, but let's go play tennis. That's not it. That's it. Making fun, being there and then joining in that fun.

Helen and I recently have been listening to music that has quite a beat, and I'm not a dancer, but I find that the music is doing something to my body. So we find ourselves spontaneously dancing in the kitchen in the morning as we're getting breakfast or our dinner.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Or both.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Those are the memories that go with me all day long.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

He's a great dancer.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

When she talks about work at breakfast, I don't remember much of what she said, but I do remember that we moved together and that we had this little fun and we hugged each other and then went off to the boring thing called work.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Except talking to Meagen. That's not boring.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

No. Well, this is not work. No, this is not work.

**Meagen Gibson**

The dancing is such a wonderful example of a form of listening, because there's such an exchange of body language that you're listening to.

**[00:35:06] Dr Harville Hendrix**

The word in psychology is resonance. You're resonant with each other. Your energy and my energy are responding to each other. That's what happened in early childhood with the infant and the caretaker in the first few months. Maybe a lucky kid for the first year until the parents stopped being resonant because the parents were tired or busy or had another child or had to go to work, whatever reason, not even a pathological one.

But they needed to come back so the kid could say okay, mommy has to go do something or Daddy has to go do something. But they'll be back and the baby's fine. But if the parents don't promise to be back and then come back when they promise, the baby goes anxious. Now it has to cry or go silent.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Another word for resonance is presence.

When Harville gets excited about when we're driving down the highway and there's an antique car. Helen, there's a 57 Mercedes.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

No 57 Chevy. You got to get this right.

**Meagen Gibson**

Just listen better, Helen.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

I'm on a cell phone and I'm going, I'm busy. First it's just a car, and number two, it's an old car. Why does he get excited? Or then if there's construction and it's getting higher. Now I put down what I'm doing in the seat beside him and go, oh, look at that car. Oh, isn't that color of the car great? Because I want to be with him in the experience.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Yeah, but you have to get the car right.

**Meagen Gibson**

The details. Well, and it's such a trap too, because we think of relationships based on compatibility and sometimes we confuse compatibility with sameness. There's not a couple on earth that is passionate about identical things. That would be very strange. I don't think it has ever existed since the beginning of time.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

That is absolutely true.

### **[00:37:17] Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

But you can practice being present as my partner's experiencing.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

What you get out of that is when you stretch into being resonant with your partner's experience, you get that experience as a derivative. You don't have to go have the experience, you have it through your partner. Your brain has a new memory. Every time, listen without judging, you get a new memory. Guess what?

Slowly that changes the configuration of your brain so that you get a better brain. That's the power of a dynamic relationship, is that not only is it fun to be together, but you get an integrated brain out of that, which makes it possible to live together. The paradox of stretching into each other's world without judgment is that you can stretch into the other person's world.

After a while, it's not stretching, after a while it becomes, wow, it's like exercise. This is not painful anymore. It's like I miss it when I don't exercise. Now I don't have to stretch into your world, I'm curious about it. Tell me more about that. In the older vocabulary, that would be called healing. But we don't think healing is the right word.

It came from medicine, where you get a cut and it heals. This is way beyond that. This is transformation. The whole form of the relationship is changed, from reactive interaction to resonant interaction. The emotions about that are different. So when you change this space between - which is another term Helen brought into our work, she read Martin Buber, who talked about the I thou and the hyphen. That's the space between the I and the thou. So she brought that in.

Lo and behold, we're discovering that Buber had not read quantum field theory, but it's very resonant with quantum field theory. There's an energy field here, and if you manage this field with positive input, it will be coherent. If you rupture it with negative input, it'll become chaotic and then you will get the consequence of the chaos you created or the resonance you created.

It's like you're the most powerful person in the world because you can choose how you're going to respond. So you choose chaos or cohesion. Well, that may mean you have to give up some bad habits to get cohesion.

### **Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

It's the positive input, but it's also just being present. When the other person is saying something, just put down what you were thinking about and say, oh, tell me more. I love how you described the listening and the importance of the flow and functioning as a duo, the listening.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I definitely want to ask you a follow up question about something you said earlier, which was, I'm putting my perspective in the mind of our conference attendee and I imagine somebody at home. It's all about them, not about me at all. I'm imagining somebody at home that might have a partner that they want to build this kind of conversation style with, but their partner theoretically is hesitant to this model.

**[00:40:58]**

It's something like if you were to say to them, what would be a good time? That invitation that you had put the example of, like, when will be a good time to discuss this? You've got a partner with maybe an avoidant or dismissive safety mechanism that triggers more avoidance for them.

But I imagine that you can as yourself, even if you don't have a partner that's engaged in that yet, can engage in great listening and wonder in a way that, as Helen said, is going to start changing your partner's brain in a way that starts to very slowly dismantle that avoidance and dismissal. That's not a word, by the way I just made up a word.

### **Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

When I've also talked with others that have said, I really want to do this, and I don't think my partner will. I suggest, when is your birthday, your next birthday, or is there a religious holiday you celebrate where you exchange gifts? Maybe this isn't ideal for a wedding anniversary, but on your birthday saying the one thing I would like to do is an Imago or a safe conversation training together where we learn to do dialogue and that we do it for six months.

And then if we don't want to continue, that's okay, but could we just learn about it and ask it as a gift where they probably won't say no? And then a last comment I'll share is when people are beginning the process. This is one of the things that we added to how we were practicing it ourselves. We take turns where, at the end of the day, we end up being connected.

We have an on duty day that I'm on duty to make sure we're connected before we go to sleep. Because typically one person in a couple will be interested in relationship books, and the other may be interested, but they don't express their interests like the other one.

And that's that particle wave duality, every relationship has a turtle and a hailstorm. I was the hailstorm in our relationship and Harville was the turtle. Teaching it, not doing it, but anyway, now every day of the month, there's a monthly calendar, and on the first day of the month, the third, the fifth, the seventh, it's my job to make sure we are connected.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

She has the odd days.

That's supposed to be a joke. The odd days.

### **Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Every even day of the month.

### **Dr Harville Hendrix**

I'm the even.

**[00:44:16] Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

The second, the fourth, the sixth, the eighth. It was my suggestion we do it that way, because I am a little odd, I admit it. But anyway, it's his job no matter what has happened during the day, he has to, by the time we go to bed, make sure we're connected. That's just a simple thing.

Offer to massage my feet, bring me a favorite beverage or chocolate, or say, I'm sorry.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Or ask you, what would you like?

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Yeah, is there something I can do so that we feel connected? So anyway, and that's a way that two people can regulate their relationship.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

I want to add a little bit, Helen, to the preceding thing about what do you do when there's this discrepancy and desire about working on the relationship?

I agree with you about that. You can ask for it. What makes it work is I want to learn how to be a better partner to you. The only way I can do that is to get some training. There's this workshop or this seminar or this webinar or this book. I want to be a better partner, so I can't do that by myself. So I need a practice partner. Would you be willing to go and let me practice being a better partner in this workshop? You don't have to want to go and you don't have to do anything, just let me practice with you.

So you get them in the environment. You haven't judged them. You haven't said, I'm interested, you're not. You haven't shut them down. Here's what you can count on happening 90% of the time, they will like the work at the workshop better than you will, because what they'll learn at the workshop is they become empowered. Secondly, they learn it's not all their fault because usually the initiator is saying, it would be better if you would, which means you're the bad guy.

But at the workshop, we will say to him or her, now, those of you who are here by invitation or here to support your partner, we want you to know that you will enjoy this workshop better than your partner will, because what you will learn is it takes two to tango. So whatever is going on in your relationship, you both contributed to it. We want you to know that that's what you'll learn. There's no such thing as a singular healer or herder of a relationship. Two people do it with their interactions.

What you will learn is that you're not in this alone. You're not the bad guy. You're a participant in a process that's uncomfortable for you and your partner. We say that to them at the beginning, and inevitably we call them draggies. Inevitably, the draggies at the end of the workshop stand up and say glowing things about this workshop. The partner who drugged them there is not all that enthusiastic because what they had to learn was it wasn't their partner's fault. It was 50% their fault. Actually, it's nobody's fault because you just know how to engage and how to do positive social engagement.



**[00:47:57] Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Basically, we think applying for a marriage license, it should be like a driver's license. People need to read a manual, pass a test, and then they can get their marriage license. If they fail the test, they need to read the manual again, pass the test. They can get married.

**Meagen Gibson**

Don't we wish that were the way it was? Go ahead.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

One day maybe enough people will ask for that.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

It could be the law of the land. It's way more important than driving a car is getting married because the destructiveness of the marriage is great. So it could be the law of the land. You got to go to a class before you can get a marriage license.

**Meagen Gibson**

That would be delightful.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

I would support that. Especially you got to go to class before you can have a kid because you create the future with this kid. So you're responsible not for your life, but for the life of the future, of the culture itself. So I see we are starting to run out of time and was there a last thing you wanted us to respond to?

**Meagen Gibson**

No. You two have done a fantastic job. I just wanted to ask if people want to find out more about you, your work, and how they can get into one of these dialogue process workshops, how can they do that?

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Well, there are two places to go, and one is if you want a long workshop to go to [HarvilleandHelen.com](http://HarvilleandHelen.com) and our schedule, our annual schedule, is there. There are shorter workshops called Safe Conversations workshops and you go to [SafeConversations.com](http://SafeConversations.com). It's not us there, occasionally we're there. There are four hour workshops. The other workshops are 12 hours. And then Getting The Love You Want: A Guide for Couples, its 30th anniversary came out last year, I think. The back of that will give you also some of those websites, but [HarvilleandHelen.com](http://HarvilleandHelen.com) and [SafeConversations.com](http://SafeConversations.com).

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Safe Conversations is a training institute where you can sign on and see workshops. But then if you want to learn to bring it more into your life, you can get coached. One or two people can get

coached in it like with someone else coaching them. And then if they want to teach it to others, they can teach it to others.

**[00:50:23] Dr Harville Hendrix**

Yeah. We train you to do the dialogue process with anybody.

**Meagen Gibson**

It's very exciting. Thank you both so much for being with us today. It was wonderful.

**Dr Harville Hendrix**

Thank you for having us. We enjoyed meeting you and having this conversation and hope your conference goes well.

**Dr Helen LaKelly Hunt**

Yes.

**Meagen Gibson**

Thank you.