

## LESSON ELEVEN

### DISENCHANTMENT WITH PERFECTION

*And now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good.*

—John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

THE GOAL OF today's meditation is to help you become disenchanted with perfection. I ask the question, "What if your partner's imperfect love is good enough for you?" I'll help you try on the idea that you can accept your partner's imperfections—not as an accommodation—but because you accept your own imperfections and you've discovered the deep, abiding peace that results. In other words, imperfect love can be perfectly good.



#### *Learning at a Glance*

- The three telltale signs of perfectionism and how it limits connection to your partner.
- How to become disenchanted with perfectionism.
- The way to find inherent value in your relationship by accepting your own flaws and imperfections more.

#### **The Three Voices of Perfectionism**

You've been using mindfulness to practice focusing, compassionately, on the protective and vulnerable parts of your psyche. I want to take this concept a step further and invite you to notice how perfectionism, which is a specific kind of protective attitude, sabotages very good relationships. One way you can tell if perfectionism is a problem in your relationship is by identifying three of the most common perfectionistic "voices," or mental attitudes, inside you:

1. **Not enough:** This is the belief that your partner should always be making more effort.



You have very high expectations for yourself and judge your partner if he or she doesn't exceed expectations also. Because it's so exhausting to live with such high expectations of yourself, you procrastinate until forced by a deadline or painful consequences. Similarly, your partner tends to avoid seeking your input because "It's impossible to please you, so why bother trying."

2. **Creative Block:** This voice stops you from trying something, because whatever you do it has to be perfect the first time. Ideas are blocked because this attitude doesn't let you tolerate the learning curve of experimentation or trying something new. It says you should already know how to do it. The effect of this attitude on your partner is that he won't initiate connection with you, or won't take the lead on shared activities or projects because your expectations of him feel impossibly high.
3. **Control:** This voice believes your world should always be just right. It loves order and predictable routine in your home and family. It's afraid of being spontaneous or doing something out of order. It says, "If you're not working then you're being lazy," and judges novel routines or behaviors as "crazy" or "chaotic."

*To be disenchanted with perfectionism—meaning that you resist the temptation to exert control when feeling powerless—is actually a healthy and normal attitude to have.*

It's very difficult to have an authentic, trustworthy connection to your partner when these kinds of perfectionist voices are part of your mental habits.

To be disenchanted with perfectionism—meaning that you resist the temptation to exert control when feeling powerless—is actually a healthy and normal attitude to have. You recognize the foil of perfectionism—that it repels others and pushes resources further away from you. Your protective bias for perfection leads to an unrealistic view of your partner. It weighs you both down, and you end up relating to the other from an illusion that you are better, or that you'd be better off without the other.

### Can You Accept "As Good As It Gets?"

One of my favorite all-time movies is *As Good as It Gets*. Set in New York City, Jack Nicholson plays an obsessive-compulsive, best-selling novelist named Melvin whose behavior torments his neighbors and acquaintances, most especially a waitress named Carol played by Helen Hunt. Melvin's protective secondary emotions of anxiety are wrapped into his compulsive perfectionism.



It makes him outspoken, demanding, and rude about making his needs known. He shows little tolerance for frustration and defaults to an aggressive pursue/attack-type of behavior when something makes him anxious. For example, in response to his neighbor's dog peeing on his shoe, he picks up the tiny creature and tosses it down the building's garbage chute.

Melvin's life intersects with Carol's because she's the only waitress in his favorite restaurant who's willing to put up with his constant complaints and compulsions. As a mom who cares for a chronically ill son, Carol has developed a rigid overprotective habit that causes her to obsessively focus on pleasing others and being a caretaker. Without even thinking about it, her secondary emotional response to stress is to sacrifice and give, which make it possible for her to show kindness to someone as nasty as Melvin.

Through unusual circumstances, Melvin and Carol end up spending time together outside their normal interactions at the restaurant. Despite the topsy-turvy undulations between their secondary reactions, they both sense a strong connection at a deeper, primary-emotion level. This is confusing to both of them, and it creates some upsetting and comical missteps. On the outside, they don't seem to share the same values. But on the inside, each has intimate familiarity with loneliness, fear, and sadness, as well as a longing for these exiled feelings to be seen and freed. Their rigid, outer, secondary emotions just barely—and almost accidentally—allow each other glimpses of their softer and more balanced sides.

To fall in love—and stay in love—requires a willingness to hope and believe that there's something inherently valuable in ourselves and in the other. That's the opposite of perfectionism. We surrender our normal cost/benefit analysis just enough to send a crystal-clear message that we long for and desire the embrace and acceptance of the other. Against expectations, Melvin and Carol suspend their normal obsession with control and order and let themselves fall in love—they openly share exiled feelings (vulnerability) without control or trying to make sense of it. This is possible for any couple, no matter how much you've built up your inner walls of control in trying to make your life perfect. You can fall in love again.

Most intimacy problems are the result of a mixed message like "I want to trust you . . . but I'm skeptical that you'll really be there for me." Or "You mean a lot

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to me and I want you in my life . . . but only if you change.” It would have been more perfect if Melvin didn’t need to work on overcoming his quirks or if Carol more easily trusted others, but they can make it work by accepting the good in the present moment. No qualifier. No need to pursue perfection. No “but.” Just happy with as good as it gets.



 You may now proceed to listen to the Lesson Eleven meditation.

**After completing this meditation, turn to the next page to complete the Lesson Eleven journal and reflection questions.**  



## Lesson Eleven—Journal Questions

1. Write down the activity you were doing right before beginning the meditation.

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2. What feelings or thoughts were you aware of prior to the meditation? (For example, you might have felt distracted, stressed, confused, tired, or been struggling with a problem at work or with your kids, or rehashing an argument with your partner.) Just jot down enough information to record, generally, what mental state you were transitioning from to start the meditation.

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3. How stressed or relaxed did you feel before you started the meditation?

(Overwhelmed with stress) 1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Totally relaxed)

4. How stressed or relaxed did you feel after the meditation?

(Overwhelmed with stress) 1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Totally relaxed)





## *Lesson Eleven—Reflection Questions*

# Perfectionism Quiz



**QUIZ OVERVIEW:** To fall in love—and stay in love—requires a willingness to hope and believe that there’s something inherently valuable in ourselves and in the other. That’s the opposite of perfectionism. This informal assessment tool will tell you how much perfectionism is part of your mental habits.

**To be rated on a three-point scale of:**

Rarely (1) Sometimes (3) Frequently (5)

Scores of 1–45: Small Perfectionist Habit

Scores of 46–75: Medium Perfectionist Habit

Scores of 76–100: Very Strong Perfectionist Habit



<b>IMPORTANT NOTE: This is not a standardized test and is only meant to highlight mental habits that will benefit from mindfulness practices.</b>	<b>Rarely (1)</b>	<b>Sometimes (3)</b>	<b>Frequently (5)</b>
1. I seem to set impossible goals for myself.			
2. An average performance is unsatisfying to me.			
3. My self-worth is based upon my accomplishments.			
4. I am afraid of not reaching the standards I have set for myself.			
5. I get depressed when things don't go perfectly.			
6. Deadlines preoccupy me.			
7. I have to win to be happy.			
8. I get frustrated when I can't do something correctly the first time I try.			
9. There is not enough time in the day.			
10. People don't like me because I can't live up to their expectations.			
11. There is a correct way to do most things.			
12. I have specific rules I follow with regard to my behavior.			
13. I have high standards for myself that I must live up to.			
14. If I'm not the best, I'm a failure.			
15. Other people could do better if they would just try.			
16. I scold myself for not living up to my expectations.			
17. I avoid social interactions so I won't have to deal with others' rejections.			
18. I am impatient with others.			
19. I get nervous about being accepted when I attend parties and other social functions.			
20. I get angry easily.			
<b>TOTALS</b>			

Total points: \_\_\_\_\_





## LESSON ELEVEN ITEM CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Watched Lesson Eleven video introduction
- ☐ Read Lesson Eleven workbook chapter
- ☐ Completed Lesson Eleven audio meditation
- ☐ Completed Lesson Eleven journal and reflection questions

Note: Remember, you have 21 days to complete the 15 lessons.



