

# The Power of Commitment:

## An Interview with Dr. Gay Hendricks

by Sharon Hall

What does it take to create conscious, loving, long-term relationships? As a child of a broken home, with two divorces behind me, I've often wondered if I simply lack the genetic make-up for happy pair-bonding. When *The Whole Person Calendar* provided a chance to interview Dr. Gay Hendricks, best-selling author, public speaker, psychologist, and founder of the Hendricks Institute, I jumped at it. Maybe I could get some answers from the relationship guru, just in time for Valentine's Day.

Dr. Hendricks, along with his co-creator and wife, Kathlyn, wrote one of the most popular relationship books of all time, *Conscious Loving*. Together, they have helped thousands of people create successful, loving relationships. In his book, *The Five Wishes*, Hendricks describes how a chance conversation at a party revealed a path to his destiny. It all started with a question from a man named "Ed":

*If you were on your deathbed, and someone asked you if your life was a complete success, what would you answer? You might say yes, or you might say no. If you said no, the next step would be to ask; what is the thing that you wished had happened, that would have made it a success?*



SH: *Dr. Hendricks, I've had a chance to read The Five Wishes twice. Can you explain the process you discovered in that question and where it took you?*

GH: It's the kind of question that, whether it's first time you ask it, or the thousand and first time, is still great. There's an old saying that the quality of your life is determined by the quality of the questions you ask. If you ask yourself a big question, that question keeps growing and expanding inside of you. Asking yourself a question like the ones in the book takes you out of a negative mindset and puts you in a mindset that asks, "What can I do, in this moment, that will further my most sacred goals?"

SH: *Since this is the love issue, tell me about your first wish; to have a loving, long-term, passionate relationship with a woman.*

GH: At the time, it surprised me when that came up first. I realized it was what I really wanted — a lasting relationship with a woman that I could grow with over the years, because I'd never had that. I realized if I got to the end and had not created that, I would not consider my life a success. I was successful in other areas; I'd already written a couple of books, but what good is a PhD from Stanford in counseling psychology if I can't get along with one other person?

SH: *Indeed. You wrote about how hard you'd found it to commit to just one woman, and that your childhood upbringing had influenced that pattern. But you state the "aha" connection didn't come until you'd made the commitment to Kathlyn.*

GH: I think that's an astute observation. You don't really get the big insights of your life until after you've made a commitment to going beyond whatever you're stuck in. It's the commitment that liberates the insight. A lot of people try to do it the other way around, dig for the insights and hope for a great leap forward. I say, make the commitment to the great leap, and then let that bring up the insights about what's been holding you back.

SH: *I love that it didn't happen as a mental decision; you describe it as a whole body, emotional sensation. You write about energy being released in your body—not as a thought but as sensations.*

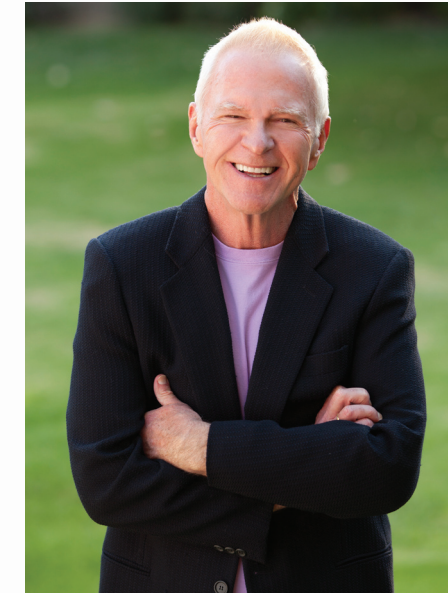
GH: I think that's the key. One of the reasons affirmations often don't work is because they're mental rather than body centered. The conscious mind thinks a new thought. It's a useful way to get started, but what really needs to happen is to harness the power of our body and heart consciousness. When those get integrated, things happen quickly. When you use affirmations, the first thing that happens is the opposite often comes up. The message is to love what you have, then manifest the next thing you want. If you're sitting there hating your old car, then you're just going to manifest more reasons to hate your old car.

SH: *That's an interesting insight!*

GH: We think of our particular form of manifestation as Einsteinian rather than Newtonian. Newtonian is the idea of getting a positive thought out there into the future, with the hope it will have an equal and opposite reaction that will pull you into your desired life. The fine print is that it will also pull up all your fears and barriers. But that's what needs to be loved and honored and explored in order to get to the positive future.

SH: *Where does commitment come into this?*

GH: Anything that is truly worthy of your commitment you might not initially know how to do. You need to make a commitment to something that feels impossible in the moment; you have to let go of knowing how it's going to get done. Eleanor Roosevelt



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(Hendricks continued from page 9)

said that all of us have one thing we need to do in this life, and it has to be something that's impossible to do. Imagine Columbus and his crew sailing out of Genoa. The moment they left land behind there wasn't anything to look back at. After two or three weeks on the ocean, there isn't anything out there. That's when you have to re-commit.

SH: *Can you explain the difference between a commitment and an affirmation? What makes a commitment so much more powerful?*

GH: It comes from two Latin words — to bring together, and to set forth. A commitment is where you gather your resources and make a sincere promise to take all necessary steps to get there. With an affirmation, there's a thought about a positive future, but you really need a commitment to doing what needs to be done in order to get there. A lot of time what happens is, like the Columbus example, everybody gets scared and starts looking for someone to blame. That's why on ships, they lock up the guns and the liquor — only the Captain has the key! I liken commitment to an automatic pilot on an airplane. It's the re-commitment after you've drifted off that's important.

SH: *Sounds a lot like sailing; you're constantly adjusting towards the horizon.*

GH: Yes. Say you're flying from New York to Los Angeles. The pilot sets it in New York and then it's always drifting off on its way to L.A. It's like, okay were drifting a little to the right; let's make a correction to the left. It gets you to LA by being mostly wrong.

SH: *That's a great metaphor. In The Five Wishes, your first great commitment was made to Kathlyn. You called and said, "I want to do this; I want to make a full heart/soul/body commitment to you. Do you want that too?" And she said, yes.*

GH: When this article comes out, we will be starting our 32nd year together. Guess it worked!

SH: *Yes, I'd say it did. What I hear you saying is, making such a deep commitment together is like moving toward the same horizon. So, this quality of commitment is something I imagine informs all your work with couples.*

GH: Of course. No matter what a couple comes in here for, it has something to do with commitment. It may have to do with the wrong kind of commitment, or a

person doesn't know how to change the commitment consciously, but it's always some kind of commitment problem. We've had couples married for 30 years, but one of them never really made a full-hearted commitment; they've always had one foot out. Or, they've used it as a way of managing, their fears, and also keep the others at a distance. I used to be fat. I realized whenever I've created a problem for myself, it's always because I have an unconscious commitment to it being that way. One day I realized I had an unconscious commitment to being fat! Then I thought, if I can create fat than I can create a healthy body.

SH: *It's hard to believe you were heavy. How long did it take?*

GH: About a year. You see, it's at the spiritual level we need to re-design ourselves. There's this part of us that's just pure spirit, that doesn't have any program-

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ming. Even with food I ask, will this feed my spirit or will it feed my old programming?

SH: *And you started doing that with everything. If we ask that question in every moment, I can imagine things really start to shift.*

GH: Yes. We have a couple online programs: Attracting Genuine Love and The Relationship Catalyst. Both of them deal with what I learned to do in that year of re-programming myself around food. A lot of us look for love out there without having learned to love ourselves. It turns on a different kind of physics when you love yourself deeply. You start attracting people that love themselves deeply, too. If you can't accept yourself, you'll draw people who have the same conflict. We get emails from people telling us that they've started attracting a whole different kind of person. I'm convinced it's due to love and self-appreciation. Science will probably figure out how it works at some point, but I don't care — it just works. It's part of my

life's mission to make sure as many people as possible understand that.

SH: *It reminds me of a question someone asked the Dalai Lama. They asked what a layperson could do to help the world become a happier, more peaceful place. His Holiness responded it was to have happy marriages, and a happy family life.*

GH: I totally agree. About 15 or so years ago, my wife and I decided to try an experiment not to say anything critical for one day. We both come from highly critical families, but we tried and it worked. Then, we tried going a week. We managed a week with a few slips, but got through it, so we tried a month. At this point, it has been almost 15 years since we've said anything critical or blaming to each other.

Imagine a world like that. First we had to prove to ourselves it could be done. Now we want to open the experiment to other people. This year, we're going to do a worldwide experiment eliminating blame and criticism. You'll get an announcement about this from hendricks.com, if you're a subscriber.

SH: *Wow. Could this filter into politics?*

GH: That's what we're trying to do. We have a lot of people from the political arena who will be joining us in this enterprise.

SH: *It's so timely and such an important aspect of moving onward — as a country, as humanity. I guess the question many people have is, how do we address problems without criticism or blame?*

GH: We want to replace blame and criticism with appreciation and creativity. In politics we have gridlock; one party tries to make the other party look bad, and we're all sick of it. I think some of the people involved have the emotional maturity of seventh or eighth graders. You know, where the big amusement is popping the other guy's butt with a wet towel. But what if, when a politician opened his mouth, it was to speak appreciation and creative solution?

SH: *My impression is that some people are afraid and deeply invested in appearing tough. Many believe in a gunslinger code; if you're not tough, you're going to get tromped on. Some may see not criticizing as a weakness, and they don't want to be perceived as weak.*

GH: Soon you will see politicians talking about this process. It will make the news. Someone is going to see if he can go a

week just speaking appreciations and creative solutions. It's an idea whose time has come. We have several million people in this country who find the negativity, nauseating. I want to say, come on guys, stop; break it up.\*

SH: *That would be a wonderful thing to see. You originally started at a clinical psychologist?*

GH: My degree from Stanford was in Counseling Psychology. I was initially interested in individual change because I didn't know anything about relationships! Then, Katie and I invented this incredible relationship, and we started writing *Conscious Loving* and books like that. One magical day, Oprah Winfrey called and we went into hyper space after appearances on her show. Thank you Oprah, for our current surroundings. We've been identified as relationship experts now for the past 20 years. What I love most about my work is watching people shift out of old patterns and invent something brand new. I've seen this happen with 20,000 individuals, about 4,500 couples and 800 business executives.

SH: *Do you use the same model you use with couples?*

GH: Pretty much. Everybody has the same communication problems. A lot of people communicate at the level of anger and blame; underneath it all is the shared perception of victim-hood. The important thing is to step off that victim merry-go-round, and take responsibility for creating something new. That's where we all are; that's where we are in politics, and that's where we are as human beings and couples, too.

SH: *How does a person start to do that in the moment? A moment where two people are blaming each other; you did this, you did that....*

GH: One thing they can do is turn to the page in *The Five Wishes* where we talk about that first set of commitments. Start with a commitment to extending the periods of time of feeling good before self-sabotage kicks in. Because we've all got these mechanisms — it's what I call the upper-limit problem. We get to a certain upper limit of how good we'll let ourselves feel, and then we start a fight with our partner or something.

SH: *You talked about this in the book. I loved the section where you talk about getting close to your wife, having a period of intimacy, and then a fight or conflict emerged.*

GH: It's like the automatic pilot. You catch yourself self-sabotaging, then take a few deep breaths and get back to your commitment to feeling good and avoiding blame.

SH: *In spite of what the other person says or does at that moment?*

GH: Exactly. Because the other person is our hallucination; we've dreamed them up. It's like we said to Central Casting, "Send me a worthy challenge, that I can

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blame for all my miseries!" One of the things that led to my great relationship with Katie was a previous relationship where I was always bugged by my partner's criticisms. I would criticize her for criticizing me, and so forth. One magical day, I realized that I must have an unconscious commitment to being criticized. How do I know that? Because I get criticized a lot! As soon as you make that little leap, you realize the very things you've been complaining about are the things you have an unconscious commitment to. That's a very empowering moment.

SH: *It sounds like taking responsibility for yourself.*

GH: Yeah. It's a maddening little moment. I realized, oh my God — I've been dreaming up this whole history of relationships with critical women out of my need to be criticized!

SH: *It takes a tremendous inward shift to accept that.*

GH: Yeah, but it's so exciting because you get your life back at that moment. Up until that point, you've farmed out all the power in your own life to other people.

SH: *That's so true. We go back and forth blaming one another, making the other person responsible for our own unhappiness or happiness.*

GH: It's underneath everything. You always hear that 50% of all marriages will

end in divorce. But what you don't hear is that 57% of second marriages end in divorce, and 63% of third marriages. Is anybody learning anything?

SH: *Well, at least there are people like you out there in the field, trying to help. Is there anything else you would like our readers to know about you, your work, your trainings and seminars?*

GH: I'd like to encourage people to come to our live seminars, if they can. We do a lot here in Southern California, in a beautiful location on the beach. We also hold seminars in Canada, the East Coast, Boulder, in Europe, and Asia. On our website, you'll see a full calendar. Also, Katie and I are committed to the democratizing of personal growth. There are people who would find it difficult to get to a seminar, so we've put them in online formats. One of the most satisfying emails I get is from someone in the outback — say Russia for example — who writes; "Thank you. This changed my life." I do it every day, but it's still wonderful and I never get tired of it.

SH: *Well, your work is obviously producing good fruit. Are there any more books on the horizon?*

GH: I have a new book called *The Big Leap* that just came out. That's actually all about the upper limit problem. I also have a mystery novel I'm working on that's part of a trilogy.

SH: *Can't wait to read it; I love mysteries. Thank you so much for your time today, Dr. Hendricks, and for inviting The Whole Person into your beautiful home.*

*For more information about The Five Wishes please visit the website at [www.5wishesbook.com](http://www.5wishesbook.com). For information about Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, the other books, and seminars at The Hendricks Institute, visit [www.hendricks.com](http://www.hendricks.com).*

*This interview was conducted and written by Sharon Hall for The Whole Person Calendar.*

*\*Editor's note: At the time of this writing, Rep. Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona is in critical condition from a rampage launched by a mentally unstable gunman who open fired on a crowd gathered to hear her speak. Six others — including a federal judge and a nine-year-old child — were killed. The debate about the effects of critical, blaming, and vitriolic speech in the political arena is now squarely on the table of our national conscience.*