



James Tobin, Ph.D.
15615 Alton Parkway | Suite 450
Irvine, CA 92618
(949) 338-4388
www.jamestobinphd.com

Psychotherapy
Couples
Parent Guidance
Buddhist Psychology and Mindfulness
Executive Coaching

Group Seminar Audio Series

“Portals” and Unconscious Compliance in Romantic Love

Romantic love is predicated not on conscious intentionality, but on unconscious dynamics. These dynamics center on the matching of certain personality styles and tendencies in one partner with receptors or “portals” in the other partner. When a match occurs, an individual’s portals (developed in early life based on strategies of attachment and bonding with the primary caregiver) accept and comply with the relational style of the new partner. It is usually the case, however, that these matchings promote the repetition of traumatic experience. Understanding the nature of one’s portals provides an important perspective for negotiating partner choice and problematic relationships. *This interactive Relationship Group seminar was recorded on December 2, 2017 in Laguna Hills, CA.*

Key Excerpts:

- *We all have a kind of relationship software in our psychologies, in our minds. You could think of it as a kind of relationship prototype. These prototypes exist along a continuum from narcissistic on one end to accommodating on the other.*
- *If somebody has been narcissistically injured during childhood, shame and humiliation are the likely results. The narcissist’s software is built to posture to the world, “you’re never going to shame or humiliate me again; I’m never really going to be vulnerable; I’m not going to try to appeal to people or win over people; I’m going to make people conform to me.” The codependent’s software is oriented toward conforming to the other, to compliance.*
- *Portal are unconscious indicators that signal to the world our receptivity to certain relationship software types. For example, one individual’s portals may be wide open and available to a narcissist’s style of relating. When these two people meet, the unconscious bonding that ensues may lock them perfectly into place.*

“Portals” and Unconscious Compliance in Romantic Love

Key Excerpts (continued)

- *Testing is a social dynamic that involves the unconscious testing of whether or not a targeted person possesses portals that will accept or reject one’s relationship software. A first date, a job interview, meeting a person for the first time are all fertile contexts for testing. And what a person is attempting to do in these situations is to recruit a person whose portals will accept their software. A dramatic example of this phenomenon is cults, in which the cult leader seeks out disciples whose portals are entirely accepting of the cult leader’s ideology.*
- *Psychological recruitment by testing the receptivity of portals is an unconscious form of manipulation. It’s psychological coercion.*
- *Portals are problematic if they are too open to others’ software or, conversely, too closed off to any influence by another. Ideally, healthy relationships involve the middle ground, where there is a receptivity to another but also a healthy amount of skepticism and self-preservation.*
- *This middle ground can be seen in what I call “catalyst” relationships. A person who serves as a catalyst for another calls attention to the portals of their partner and their origin. For example, if a woman feels she has to be “perfect” to be loved, her catalyst partner may bring this to the perfectionist’s awareness and perhaps state clearly that perfectionism is not a criterion for his relationship software. This may relieve her of the burden to be perfect and promote, instead, introspection around why she is “open” to and eager for the other’s awareness of how “good” she is. These are the relationships we want to be in, because they challenge the very essence of our portals and those whom are portals attract.*