

VOW CRAFT – SHADOW

To craft vows for a wedding of any kind, you might want to think of it structurally.

If the marriage is guided by principles, which ones are worth stating boldly?

Begin with what you want, why you want it, and forge some ideas about how you'll deal with whatever traverses your goals.

As a relationship weathers tough times, how will those principles make you stronger?

But what kind of weather are we talking about? The classics are practical – to be there in sickness and in health, for example. Meanwhile, a wedding to the self might encounter more subtle obstacles than a relationship between people. This is the moment to dance with your shadow. Get to know it. Help it throw away the used chewing gum in a graceful way.

Carl Jung spoke of the “shadow self”. At worst the shadow feeds and waters our hurt self. Childhood trauma, past humiliation, abuse, and abandonment can fester, spawning fits of rage, jealousy, arrogance, shame, defensiveness, intolerance, manipulation, self-loathing and insecurity. It's the part of you that you may hide from yourself and others. Bringing it into the light for healing is an alchemical process. Essentially, that means to work on a flawed until it is better – as opposed to discarding it or giving up. As mentioned in the video, this type of exercise can bring about an “aha” moment where you understand why you do something. But it's easy to get stuck here. A call to action is important. And the vow is your solemn promise to follow through.

The prompts below are written to trigger a viewing of your shadow. Honestly, this exercise may not be for you. If you try this and the words are met with resistance, another way might be to focus on a more physical therapy or meditation, to unlock hurts you may be harboring in your body.

Handling your vulnerability is a lifelong effort. Whenever possible, have a sense of humor about all your bits – your dark thoughts and failures, your best intentions, and the splendor you shine when you least expect it. You are a full spectrum being traveling at the speed of life.

When people can't think of vows, the shadow work helps. You also may not need this at all. But since participants come from all walks of life, it's helpful for some people to contemplate issues they may not be facing. This is just one tool. Conversely, people may not realize how well they manage adversity and should celebrate the ongoing successes. We often take much for granted.

In the performance-art weddings, I offered a mini-divorce/exorcism of past selves prior to the nuptials. It headed off the divorce jokes while pinpointing some debilitating habit or pattern. To make room for more love and compassion, what needs to go? At the festivals, people had very little time to think about these things. So, the typical banishment choice was usually something like “neediness” or “harsh self-talk”. Even under these circumstances, whoever did this quick banishing ritual always had a better wedding. It doesn't need to be epic to be effective. Maybe your vows don't need to be “deep” to be effective.

The following is a list of prompts may or may not apply to you or your clients. They're food for thought or some other emotional process. Ideally, this is used as a check-in to be your own best spouse, recognizing truthfully where you might need to be gentle or need a push. However, the challenges of managing hurtful and repressed aspects of past trauma may be beyond the scope of this exercise. Please use your best judgement to make your wedding-to-the-self meaningful and supportive.

Remember - When you've really, truly wanted something, you have figured out how to get it.

Remember that. You're here on Earth, in your body with all your spidey senses for things that aren't obvious. Every day. There is a way, somewhere, somehow.

The vows are a confirmation to live life according to your values.
They define the work to overcome hardship and celebrate your standards.
If you're not sure what these standards are, here are some prompts to get you thinking.
Brace yourself and get on with it one way or another. You have a wedding to throw!

There are numerous prompts below, in no particular order.

Peruse.

Pick one or more shadow prompts to focus on.

Writing, even just jotting stuff down, takes thoughts out of your head so you can look at them as a thing that's separate from you. You can always destroy the document.

and then...

1. Consider whom you are in your entirety
– knowing you are the perfect you – faults and all – and always growing.
2. Make a list of what you want, what you need, and what might hold you back from either.
3. Ask yourself very honestly: What can I do about it?
4. Make a plan to change what you can change and follow through as best you can. This includes finding helpful people and services.
5. If there is truly nothing you can do about something that bothers you, plan to make peace with it and find the humor in it to keep going.

The goal is to accept you and your situation at the moment, make changes or not, and vow to be your best ally through it all.

Your vows will emerge.

PROMPTS LIST:

Quickly name all the things you love. What comes to mind immediately? As you think about this after today, what occurs to you over time? Feel free to add to this ongoing list.

What would you tell your child self if you met up for lunch? What would you leave out?

What life lessons have you learned that now offer wisdom and comfort?

What are the good things, experiences, and people you've attracted that you can thank yourself for?

What is it like to be in a room with you?

How do you think people see you?

- Different members of your family
- friends (friend 1, friend 2 – how do they differ?)
- coworker
- spouse
- lover
- potential lovers
- strangers
- children

How might any one of these people describe you to someone else?

- Is that something you want to change?

If you named all the things you love, earlier, where was your name on the list?

What are the bad experiences you refuse to tolerate ever again?

- Are you doing a good job of keeping that boundary?

What would a feisty 110-year-old you tell you now?

What are the chapter titles in your memoirs so far?

What are the best chapter titles for the memoir from here on out?

Are you jealous or envious of anyone? Why?

- How does that feel?
- How do you behave around that person?

What traits bother you in others?

- Do you share any of these?

What is a trait you admire in other people that you may not possess?

Why do you think you're missing this trait?

Is anyone jealous of you?

When do you feel inadequate?

When do you think you're better than other people?

What memories are you ashamed of?

Are you ashamed of anything now?

What triggers self-consciousness (not shame)? How does that play out?

What moments hurt you the most? Are you still getting hurt? Do you replay memories of these in your mind?

What situations are "easy"?

When have you undermined yourself? What happened?

What triggers self-destructive behavior or bad habit?

- A certain kind of place, situation, or type of person?
- What is "bad" behavior?
- What is an acceptable vice?

What's the most embarrassing thing about you? What would happen if someone saw that?

If you could start over right now, what would be different?

Are you secretly afraid of outdoing your parents?

What skill or knack do you possess but fear trying to develop?

Is a betrayed trust still on your mind? Can you do something about it?

- Does it serve you in some way to hold onto the feelings? Or is the information enough?

What lies do you tell yourself?

What are you still angry about? Is it helpful to be angry?

When did you last feel defensive? Have you healed from that?

What are the negative relationship patterns you might be repeating?

- Do they turn up in different kinds of relationships?
- What must shift to not keep needing these lessons, attracting this energy?

What can you thank past people and experiences for?

How do you feel about your body?

Do you ever feel unsafe, physically or mentally? If so, what steps can you take to change that?

Who has influence over you? Do they know it? Do you want that?

Which relationships are you tired of?

Do you feel heard?

Are you good looking? What are your best features?

Are you healthy?

What is good about you?

Are you generous enough?

Do you have problems being on time?

- If so, why?

Do you follow your instincts?

Do you treat yourself enough?

- Is there something you should be doing for yourself that's only for fun?

Is there someone in your life who keeps you from doing what you need to do?

- Are you somehow encouraging this person's behavior?

How do you respond to drama and emotional situations?

Whom do you treasure in your life? This can include anyone in the world.

- Why does this person/these people matter so much?

- If you wrote a love letter to this person, full of praise, what would it say?

How can you be kinder to yourself?

What would a sincere love letter written **to you** say?

Who might write that?

Who might not but you wish would? Write out for fun and read it back.

Who makes you feel safe?

Do you overthink things? What would balanced thinking be like?

Who is a disappointment in your life?

- Are your expectations about that person reasonable? Would others agree?

- Can you forgive them and truly move on with ease? What would that take?

What emotions do you avoid?

- What would happen if you allowed yourself to feel them?

- Is there a safe place to feel them? If not, how can you create that?

What do you wish people understood about you?

What do you miss from your younger days?

If you're upset, what age do you feel you are at that moment? Is there a reason for that?

Do you need forgiveness?

- If the person you hope will forgive you is unable or unwilling to do so, it can be maddening, especially if you have grown past the behavior. So, remember...

- *Ultimately, it is you who does the forgiving. It's in your head and your heart. To truly forgive is to no longer feel the negative emotional impact of a situation. To say, "It's fine," and mean it. This takes processing.*

Is there anyone you need to forgive? Even small grudges?

Have you stored deep trauma in your body? Where?

What is your physical response to ordinary stress?

What do you do to feel comfort? Should you do this more? Are there better ways?

What do you do that drives other people crazy or disappoints them?

If you were to meet you, what would you think?

How do you accept compliments?

Is there a time when something difficult in life turned into a good thing on some level?

What do you do that makes your life harder?

What do you do that makes life better?

Do you generally finish tasks that you begin?

- If yes – did you procrastinate?

- If not – why were they abandoned? Is that okay?

- What would help break or shift these patterns?

- What will they be replaced with?

For what can you thank people (including strangers) and experiences for?

- What was enjoyable?

- How did the good things come about?

- What were the circumstances?

- Can you be grateful for parts of a bad situation?

-- For the learning?

- How can the good situation be repeated?

What hobbies or other activities do you miss?

What makes you feel valued?

Who were/are your heroes?

Do you share values with all the members of your family?

- If not, how do they differ?

What are the best things about your family?

Do you place the values of other people ahead of mine?

Are you too hard on yourself? Have you ever been too hard on yourself? Should you be harder?

How old do you feel?

If you could change something from childhood, it would be...

What are your regrets?

What heartbreaking moments still linger?

How do you handle judgement or criticism of any kind? Is that holding you back?

Are you in denial about a situation or someone?

- What is a truth you feel, or that concerns you, but you do not act on?

- Do you keep quiet, letting it bother you?

- Do you avoid the feelings? Where do you put them?

What feels like you've had a good day?

Are you a good listener?

- even when it's boring or it's not good news?

What distracts you?

Do you talk too much?

- If so, why?

Do you keep quiet when you should speak up?

- If so, why?

What angers you? What happens next?

What do you do to enforce boundaries?

If you could safely confront someone who hurt you, what would you say?

When and where are you completely comfortable, at peace?

What is the most hurtful thing you've done to someone else?

Do any broken promises haunt you?

Do you feel loved? Enough?

What do you keep promising to do that you don't do?

Do you feel broke even when you're financially functioning?

Do you manipulate others? Why?

Do you ever act "out of character"? What might trigger this?

Do you tell lies? Why?

If you could meet your shadow self, what would that look like?

What is your process for releasing tension and/or grounding yourself?

- Should you do it more often?

- Does it need a change of some kind (type or frequency)?

What does success look like? If you don't have that now, what would achieving it feel like?

What does it feel like to live with self-acceptance? Is there someone who exemplifies this?

Do you feel successful? Is there something you do that you're proud of?

Do you accept yourself unconditionally?

- If not, how could you show more compassion?

What makes you happy?

- Name all the things that come to mind. Can you do them more often?

What do you want?

Note: Feel free to write absolutely everything in detail and keep adding to the list as needed.

The key to efficiency is to define deal breakers vs preferences, honoring both as valid.

This is the part where one leaves room for the universe to get creative as it answers the call.

If someone who deeply knows and loves you and whom you respect and love in return, were to help you with any item on this list, what would that be like?

Those are some things to think about. Being positive in the face of adversity requires action.

Be gentle, you are forever a work in progress. BE YOUR FINEST ALLY.

With love, Gabrielle Heron ©2023