

## The Challenge Of Merging Your Lives

Lily and Don, both in their 40s, decided to get married after dating each other for a year. Lily's children were in college, while Don still had children coming to his house every other weekend. They discovered early in their marriage that it was one thing to date and quite another to merge their lives in the same house. Little things started to bother them that were not issues when they were living separately and just spending weekends together. They called me for a consultation. "How do we take care of ourselves while respecting each other's needs and ways of doing things?" For example, Lily always woke up each morning by her own internal clock. She could tell herself at night that she wanted to be awake at 7:00 and she would wake up at 7:00. She hated waking up to an alarm clock. Don always woke up with an alarm clock, and during the week would get up at 5:30. Since they had previously been together only on weekends, this had never been a problem. Now it was a huge problem. Don needed the alarm and Lily, jolted awake each morning, was feeling very grumpy. They wanted to sleep in the same bed. What to do? And this was only one of many different issues that had come up since they got married. All relationships have issues such as these. It may be that one person is neat and the other messy, one partner is on time and the other is late, one is a morning person and the other a night person, one a democrat and the other republican, one wants sex frequently and the other is not often turned on. Does one partner have to give himself or herself up for the other? This does NOT work well. It will eventually lead to resentment. Problems such as these get resolved only when both partners have each other's highest good at heart, as well as their own highest good. If one or both partners are focused on winning or not losing, neither will be happy with the solution. But when both partners care about themselves and each other, they will find solutions where both feel like winners. As Don and Lily opened to learning and caring about themselves and each other, a couple of solutions came to mind. One was for Don to get some hypnosis training to learn to wake himself up without an alarm. Another was for him to get a quiet, musical alarm and for Lily to wear earplugs. They decided to try both solutions and see how they worked. The process itself of being open to learning and caring about themselves and each other - rather than just trying to control or not be controlled - created warm and close feelings between them. Knowing that they were both going to care about themselves and each other created a deep sense of safety between them. Win-win conflict resolution occurs only in an arena of deep caring. All close relationships offer us the opportunity to learn and care about ourselves and each other. So, if you love a clean house and your partner is messy, or you want to be on time and your partner is always late, or you want to make love three times a week and your partner is interested only once a week - try opening to learning rather than trying to control each other. You will be surprised at the new information and solutions that emerge when learning and caring are more important than controlling and winning.

## About the Author

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. best-selling author of eight books, and co-creator of the powerful Inner Bonding healing process. Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course: <http://www.innerbonding.com> <mailto:margaret@innerbonding.com>. Phone sessions available.

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