HIS NEEDS HER NEEDS

FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

HIS NEEDS HER NEEDS

Building an Affair-Proof Marriage

Willard F. Harley, Jr.

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To
Joyce—
my one and only

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Preface to the 15th Anniversary Edition

When I was nineteen, a married acquaintance in college told me his marriage was in trouble and asked for my advice. The advice I gave did not seem to help—his marriage ended in divorce. Why couldn't I help? What was it about my friend's marriage that made divorce seem so inevitable?

It was 1960, and I was about to witness something that few expected—the beginning of the end of the traditional nuclear family in America. Evidence of this disaster accumulated over the next twenty years. The divorce rate climbed from about 10 percent to over 50 percent, and the percentage of single adults would go from 6.5 percent to 20 percent. While the divorce rate finally stabilized at about 50 percent in 1980, the percentage of single adults has continued to climb right up to the present. It is currently at about 30 percent and climbing because fewer and fewer people are willing to commit themselves to one partner for life.

At the time, I didn't know that my friend's marital failure was part of a trend that was about to overwhelm nuclear families. I thought that

his failure was, at least in part, due to my inexperience. I blamed myself. Thought I should not have tried to give advice. That I should have left it to an "expert."

But over the next few years, couples kept asking for my advice regarding marriage, especially after I earned a Ph.D. in psychology. After all, psychologists were supposed to know something about marriage. So I decided to learn enough to help these people. I didn't think it would be much of a challenge. After all, if our scientists knew enough to send people to the moon, surely they would know how to save marriages.

I read books on marital therapy, was supervised by "experts" in the field, and worked in a clinic that specialized in marital therapy and claimed to be the best in Minnesota. But I was still unable to save marriages. Almost everyone who came to me for help ended up like my college friend—divorced.

In my effort to overcome my own personal failure, I made a crucial discovery. I wasn't the only one failing to help couples. Almost everyone else working with me in the clinic was failing as well! My supervisor was failing, the director of the clinic was failing, and so were the other marriage counselors who worked with me.

And then I made the most astonishing discovery of all. *Most of the marital experts in America were also failing.* It was very difficult to find anyone willing to admit their failure, but when I had access to actual cases, I couldn't find any therapist who could prove their success or train others to be successful in saving marriages.

In fact, I learned that marital therapy had the lowest success rate of any form of therapy. In one study, I read that less than 25 percent of those surveyed felt that marriage counseling did them any good whatsoever, and a higher percentage felt that it did them more harm than good. (Incidentally, as recently as 1995, a Consumer's Report study of psychotherapy reported that marital therapy is still rated lowest in effectiveness).

What a challenge! Marriages were breaking up at an unprecedented rate, and no one knew how to stop it. So I made it my own personal ambition to find the answer, and I looked for that answer not in books and scholarly articles but among those who came to me for answers—couples about to divorce.

I stopped counseling and started listening to spouses explain why they were ready to throw in the towel. What did they have when they decided to marry that they lost somewhere along the way. I asked them, "What do you think it would take for you to be happily married again?"

I knew that I had not yet learned how to save marriages, so I explained that inability to the couples I counseled. And, appropriately, I did not charge any of them for my time. I taught psychology to earn a living and talked with couples in my office on a part-time basis. And my policy of free, albeit ineffective, counseling provided me with more troubled couples than I had time to see.

By 1975 I had discovered why I and so many other therapists were having trouble saving marriages. We did not understand what made marriages work. We were all so preoccupied with what seemed to make them fail that we overlooked what made them succeed. Whenever a couple would come to my office, they would be making each other miserable. So I thought, as most others thought, that if I could simply get them to communicate more clearly, resolve their conflicts more effectively, and stop fighting with each other so much, that their marriage would be saved. But that wasn't the answer.

Couple after couple explained to me that they didn't marry each other because they communicated so clearly or resolved their conflicts effectively or didn't fight. They married each other because they found each other irresistible—they were in love. But by the time they came to my office they had lost that feeling of love. In fact, many were finding each other downright repulsive. And one of the primary reasons that they were communicating so poorly, resolving their conflicts so ineffectively, and fighting so much, was that they had lost that feeling of love.

When I asked the question, "What would it take for you to be happily married again?" most couldn't imagine that ever happening. But when I persisted and couples were able to reflect on my question, the answer I heard repeated over and over was, "for us to be in love again."

Granted, poor communication, failure to resolve conflicts, and fighting all contribute to the loss of love. But they are also symptoms of lost love. In other words, if I wanted to save marriage, I would have to go beyond improving communication. I would have to learn how to restore love.

With this insight I began to attack emotional issues rather than rational issues. My primary goal in marital therapy changed from resolving conflicts to restoring love. If I knew how to restore love, I reasoned, then communication, conflict resolution, and fighting might not be as much of a problem.

My background as a psychologist taught me that learned associations trigger most of our emotional reactions. Whenever something is presented repeatedly with a physically induced emotion, it tends to trigger that emotion all by itself. For example, if you flash the color blue along with an electric shock, and the color red with a soothing back rub, eventually the color blue will tend to upset you and the color red will tend to relax you.

Applying the same principle to the feeling of love, I theorized that love might be nothing more than a learned association. If someone were to be present often enough when I was feeling particularly good, the person's presence in general might be enough to trigger that good feeling—something we have come to know as the feeling of love.

I could not have been more correct in my analysis. By encouraging each spouse to try to do whatever it took to make each other happy and avoid doing what made each other unhappy, that feeling of love was restored with the very next couple I counseled. Their marriage was saved.

From that point on, each time I saw a couple, I simply asked them what the other could do that would make them the happiest, and whatever it was, that was their first assignment. Of course, not every couple really knew what would make them happy, and not every spouse was willing to do it. So I certainly wasn't successful with every couple.

But as I perfected my approach to this problem, I began to understand what it was that husbands and wives needed from each other to trigger the feeling of love, and I helped them identify what each of them needed. I also became more effective in motivating them to meet whatever need was identified, even when they didn't feel like it at first.

Before long, I was helping almost every couple fall in love and thereby avoid divorce. My method proved to be so successful, that I quit teaching psychology, and started counseling full-time. As you can imagine, there were more couples wanting help from me than I could possibly counsel.

Ten years after I began using this method, I finally wrote my first book describing it, *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*. And now, fifteen years after the first copy came off the press, over one million copies have been printed and it has been translated into eleven languages. Many have called it the best book on marriage ever written. That may be true, because as far as I know it is still the only book written that provides a tried and proven plan for married couples to restore and sustain their love for each other.

What makes this book so effective is that it gets right to the heart of what makes marriages work—the feeling of love. Communication and problem-solving skills are important in a happy marriage, but not absolutely essential. It's the feeling of love that's absolutely essential. In all my years as a marriage counselor, I've never counseled a couple in love who wanted a divorce. But I've counseled many divorcing couples with excellent communication and problem-solving skills.

Don't get me wrong—I'm very much in favor of improving communication and problem solving in marriage. But unless those skills help trigger the feeling of love, spouses feel cheated in their marriages and often want out.

This book will teach you what's most important in marriage—how to fall in love and stay in love with each other. I encourage you and your spouse to read this book together, complete the questionnaires, and answer the questions at the end of each chapter. You might even use two different colored highlighters as you read so each of you can let the other know what is most important to you.

I have received letters from scores of couples who have dedicated each New Year's Day to re-reading *His Needs, Her Needs* as a reminder of what they must do in the coming year to keep their marriage passionate. And it works. This is a book to be read often, because it's about being skilled in meeting each other's most important emotional needs.

Introduction

Marital conflict is created one of two ways: (1) Couples *fail to make* each other *happy*, or (2) couples make each other *unhappy*. In the first case, couples are frustrated because their needs are not being met. In the second case, they're deliberately hurting each other. I call the first cause of conflict *failure to care* and the second, *failure to protect*.

This book addresses the failure to care—failure to meet each other's most important emotional needs. Ignorance contributes to this failure because men and women have great difficulty understanding and appreciating the value of each other's needs. Men tend to try to meet needs that they would value and women do the same. The problem is that the needs of men and women are often very different and we waste effort trying to meet the wrong needs.

The right needs are so strong that when they're not met in marriage, people are tempted to go outside marriage to satisfy them. And most of the people I've counseled have yielded to the temptation to violate their sacred vow to "forsake all others."

But aside from the risk of an affair, important emotional needs *should be met* for the sake of care itself. Marriage is a very special relationship. Promises are made to allow a spouse the *exclusive* right to meet some of these important needs. When they are unmet, that is unfair to the spouse who must go through life without ethical alternatives.

This book will help couples to identify these important needs, to communicate them to each other, and to learn to meet them.

The second cause of marital conflict, failure to protect, is the subject of a companion book I've written, *Love Busters: Overcoming the Habits That Destroy Romantic Love*. Couples that find their needs unmet often become thoughtless and inconsiderate. When that happens, marriages slide into ugly and destructive scenes. The failure to meet these needs is often unintentional, but reaction to unmet needs develops into *intentional* harm. That often leads to unbearable pain and, ultimately, divorce.

To help couples overcome marital conflict, my strategy focuses on both causes of conflict: the failure to care and the failure to protect. This book and its companion volume will help you create a marriage that is fulfilling and safe.

The exercises mentioned in both books refer to forms I use in my counseling practice. While many of these forms are printed in this book, all of them are available in *Five Steps to Romantic Love: A Workbook for a Healthy Marriage for Readers of Love Busters* and *His Needs, Her Needs*. Any husband and wife who are serious about improving their marriage will benefit from working through all of the worksheets in this workbook.

Successful marriages require skill—skill in caring for the one you promised to cherish throughout life. Good intentions are not enough. *This book was written to educate you in the care of your spouse.* Once you have learned its lessons, your spouse will find you irresistible, a condition that is essential to a happy and successful marriage.

1

How Affair-Proof Is Your Marriage?

I've written this book for those who want to be happily married. Whether you have just started your life together, have had a mediocre marriage for a number of years, or have had a horrible marriage, you can have a happy marriage if you learn to:

> Become aware
> of each other's emotional needs
> and learn to meet them.

This is a simple statement, but applying this principle to the complexities of marriage requires some careful thought. Let's take a look at what it really involves.

When a man and woman marry, they share high expectations. They commit themselves to meeting certain intense and intimate needs

in each other on an *exclusive* basis. Each agrees to "forsake all others," giving each other the exclusive right to meet these intimate needs. That does not imply that all needs are to be met by a spouse, but that there are a few basic needs that most of us strictly reserve for the marriage bond. Most people expect their spouses to meet these special needs, since they have agreed not to allow anyone else to meet them.

For example, when a man agrees to an exclusive relationship with his wife, he depends on her to meet his sexual need. If she fulfills this need, he finds in her a continuing source of intense pleasure, and his love grows stronger. However, if his need goes unmet, quite the opposite happens. He begins to associate her with frustration. If the frustration continues, he may decide she "just doesn't like sex" and may try to make the best of it. But his strong need for sex remains unfulfilled. His commitment to an exclusive sexual relationship with his wife has left him with the choice of sexual frustration or infidelity. Some men never give in; they manage to make the best of it over the years. But many *do* succumb to the temptation of an affair. I have talked to hundreds of them in my counseling offices.

Another example is a wife who gives her husband the exclusive right to meet her need for intimate conversation. Whenever they talk together with a depth of honesty and openness not found in conversation with others, she finds him to be the source of her greatest pleasure. But when he refuses to give her the undivided attention she craves, he becomes associated with her greatest frustration. Some women simply go through their married lives frustrated, but others cannot resist the temptation to let someone else meet this important emotional need. And when they do, an affair is the likely outcome.

His Needs Are Not Hers

When a husband and wife come to me for help, my first goal is to help them identify their most important emotional needs—what each of them can do for each other to make them happiest and most content. Over the years, I have repeatedly asked the question, "What could your spouse do for you that would make you the happiest?" I've been able to classify most of their responses into ten emotional needs—admiration, affection, conversation, domestic support, family com-

mitment, financial support, honesty and openness, physical attractiveness, recreational companionship, and sexual fulfillment.

Obviously the way to keep a husband and wife happily married is for each of them to meet the needs that are most important to the other. But when I conducted all these interviews I discovered why that is such a difficult assignment. Nearly every time I asked couples to list their needs according to their priority, men listed them one way and women the opposite way. Of the ten basic emotional needs, the five listed as most important by men were usually the five least important for women, and vice versa.

What an insight! No wonder husbands and wives have so much difficulty meeting each other's needs. They are willing to do for each other what they appreciate the most, but it turns out that their efforts are misdirected because what they appreciate most, their spouses appreciate least!

Pay careful attention to this next point I'm about to make, because it's one of the most misunderstood aspects of my program. Every person is unique. While men *on the average* pick a particular five emotional needs as their most important and women *on the average* pick another five, *any individual* can and does pick any combination of the basic ten. So although I have identified the most important emotional needs of the average man and woman, I don't know the emotional needs of any particular husband and wife. And since I'm in the business of saving individual marriage, not average marriages, you need to identify the combinations of needs that are unique to your marriage. I have provided a brief summary of the ten basic needs in appendix A and the Emotional Needs Questionnaire in appendix B. This will help you identify the most important emotional needs unique to you and your spouse.

Often the failure of men and women to meet each other's emotional needs is simply due to ignorance of each other's needs and not selfish unwillingness to be considerate. Fulfilling those needs does not mean you have to painfully grit your teeth, making the best of something you hate. It means preparing yourself to meet needs you may not appreciate yourself. By learning to understand your spouse as a totally different person than you, you can begin to become an expert in meeting all that person's emotional needs.

In marriages that fail to meet those needs, I have seen, strikingly and alarmingly, how married people consistently choose the same pattern to satisfy their unmet needs: the extramarital affair. People wander into affairs with astonishing regularity, in spite of whatever strong moral or religious convictions they may hold. Why? Once a spouse lacks fulfillment of any of the five needs, it creates a thirst that must be quenched. If changes do not take place within the marriage to care for that need, the individual will face the powerful temptation to fill it outside of marriage.

In order to make our marriages affair-proof, we cannot hide our heads in the sand. The spouse who believes his or her partner is "different" and, despite unmet needs, would never take part in an affair may receive a devastating shock someday. Instead, we need to understand the warning signs that an affair could happen, how such liaisons may begin, and how to strengthen the weak areas of a marriage in the face of such a relationship.

What Is an Affair?

An affair usually consists of two people who become involved in an extramarital relationship that combines sexual lovemaking with feelings of deep love. However, it is possible to have an affair with only lovemaking or with only the feeling of love towards someone outside of marriage. Although these types of affairs may also cause deep problems in marriage, my experience shows that they are more easily dealt with than the relationship that combines sex (usually very passionate sex) with very real love. That relationship threatens the marriage to its core, because the lovers experience real intimacy, and it meets at least one emotional need of the spouse outside the exclusive marital relationship. In most cases, when one spouse discovers the other has broken the commitment of faithfulness, the marriage is shattered.

Affairs Usually Start by "Just Being Friends"

An affair usually begins as a friendship. Frequently your spouse knows your lover; not uncommonly the third party is the husband or wife in a couple you both know and consider "best friends." In another

common pattern the outside lover comes from your spouse's family—a sister or brother. Or you may have met your lover at work.

When an affair starts, it usually begins as a friendship. You share problems with the other person, and that person shares problems with you. Usually, for the affair to blossom, you have to see this other person quite often: every day at work or frequently through a friendship, being on a committee or board, or some other responsibility that brings you together.

As your friendship deepens, you start giving each other mutual support and encouragement, especially in regard to your unmet needs. Life is difficult. Many people become extremely disillusioned about their lives. When they find someone encouraging and supportive, the attraction toward that person acts as a powerful magnet. Sooner or later, you find yourself in bed with your encouraging and supportive friend. It just seems to "happen." You don't intend it, and neither does your friend.

Very often the friendship that grows into an affair is not based on physical attraction. A wife will get a look at her husband's lover and exclaim, "How in the world could he be interested in *her*?"

The answer is, "Very easily," because the attraction is emotional. It doesn't necessarily matter if the other woman is overweight, plain, or really rather ugly. What matters is that she has been able to meet an unfulfilled need. The lover in an affair often turns out to be regarded as the most caring person the wayward spouse has ever met. The straying spouse develops a reciprocal desire to care for the lover at a depth never before experienced.

When you become caught in an affair, you and your lover share a strong willingness to meet each other's needs. This willingness binds you in a mutual love that develops into a passionate sexual relationship. This mutual desire to bring each other happiness builds an affair into one of the most satisfying and intimate relationships either of you have ever known.

As the intensity of your mutual care and passion increases, you discover yourself caught in a trap of your own making. You lose all sense of judgment as you literally become addicted to each other in a relationship built upon fantasy, not reality.

Several factors contribute to making an affair so enjoyable and exciting:

- You and your lover seem to bring out the best in each other.
- You ignore each other's faults.
- You get turned on sexually as never before. You feel sure no one else could ever be as exciting a sex partner as your secret new lover.

What really turns you on, however, is not your new partner, but the fantasy. As you and your lover plan where and when to meet for passionate sessions of lovemaking you leave the realities of living behind. Your affair may go on for quite a while before anyone detects it. The longer it goes on, the more difficult you will find breaking it off.

As I've discussed affairs and how they start, I may have offended you, at least a little bit, by using the second-person pronoun. But I used *you* for a specific reason. While most people would deny they could ever get involved in an affair, the hard truth is that, under the right (or wrong) conditions, any of us can fall victim, if our basic needs are not being met.

It doesn't take something different or special to fall into an affair. On the contrary, sometimes very normal men and women get involved in one through a deceptively simple process. When your basic needs go unmet, you start thinking, *This isn't right. It isn't fair.*

Next you start looking for support and find yourself saying, *If only I had someone to talk to.*

From there it can only be a short step to looking for support outside your exclusive marriage bond. You don't necessarily go hunting for this person; he or she just turns up, and you find yourself saying, "Isn't it great how we can just talk and share together?"

In some cases the above process may take only a few months; in other cases it will take many years. But it can happen. I have seen it happening in the lives of my clients for the last twenty-five years. Sadly enough, it seems to make little difference what a person professes by way of religious commitment or moral values.

Early in my career as a counselor I often felt dismayed to see people with strong religious and moral commitments becoming involved in extramarital affairs. I am a church member myself, with strong convictions about the Christian faith. How could people who claim to have the same commitments go astray? Did their faith lack power?

The more I dealt with Christian clients and other people with deep moral convictions, the more I understood the power of our basic emotional needs. I came to see my own weaknesses and the strength of my own needs. When I married my wife, Joyce, I determined to be totally committed to her and to my marriage. I have remained true to my vows for the thirty-eight years of our marriage, but not because I am some kind of iron-willed paragon of virtue. It's because Joyce and I have been realistic about meeting each other's important emotional needs.

In short, your needs keep score. To help you understand how this works, I'd like to introduce you to the Love Bank—an inner scoring device you probably never realized you had.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Willard F. Harley, Jr., Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and marriage counselor. Over the past twenty-five years he has helped thousands of couples overcome marital conflict and restore their love for each other. His innovative counseling methods are described in the books and articles he writes. *His Needs, Her Needs* has been a best-seller since it was published in 1986 and has been translated into German, French, Dutch, and Chinese. Dr. Harley also leads training workshops for couples and marriage counselors and has appeared on hundreds of radio and television programs.

Willard Harley and Joyce, his wife of over thirty years, live in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. They are the parents of two married children who are also marriage counselors.

Dr. Harley would be delighted to hear from you. His web site is:
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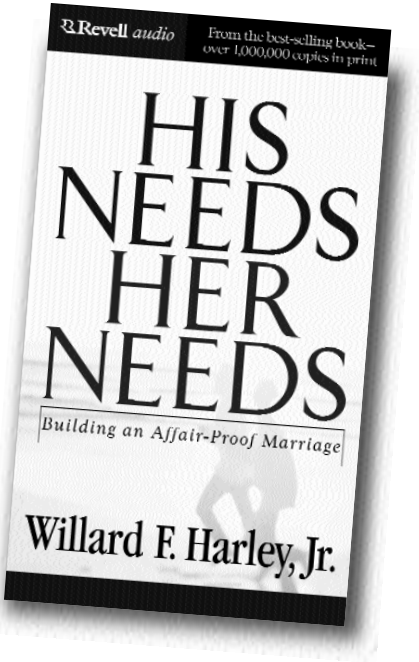
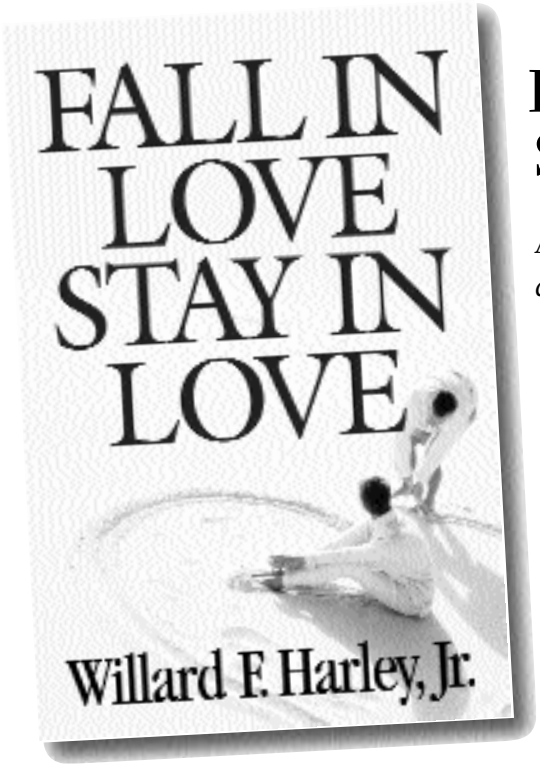


An unabridged recording of the 15th anniversary edition of *His Needs, Her Needs* is now available in audiocassette format. Listen to Dr. Harley's wisdom and discover how identifying and meeting your spouse's most important emotional needs will deepen your love and desire for each other.



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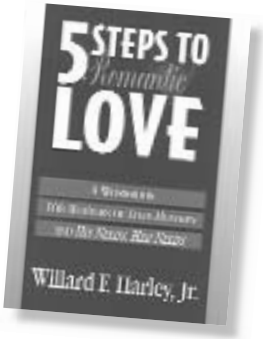

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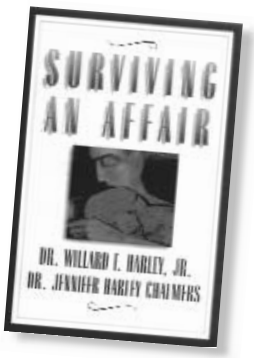

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Dr. Harley has saved thousands of marriages from the pain of unresolved conflict and the disaster of divorce. His successful approach to building marriages can help you too.

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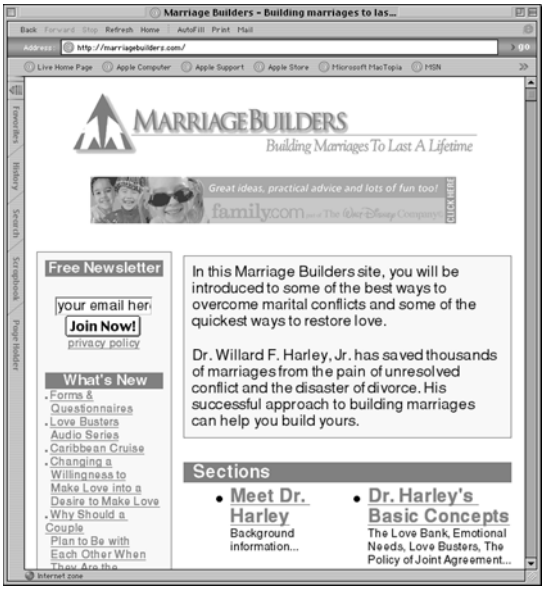
At the Marriage Builders web site Dr. Harley introduces visitors to some of the best ways to overcome marital conflicts and some of the quickest ways to restore love. From the pages of "Basic Concepts" and articles by Dr. Harley to the archives for his weekly Q&A columns and information about upcoming seminars, this site is packed with useful material.



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