

ancestors. The family stories associated with these relatives embody values we share as a couple. For example, there is a picture of my great-grandfather, a kosher butcher who was known for his generosity. Every week he would give away 10 percent of his meat to needy families of all religions, including gypsies. He actually had a spy network that alerted him to which families were hungry, and the meat would then magically appear on their doorstep. I often would tell our daughter that he embodied the kind of caring and giving that we value and aspire to emulate.

SHARED VALUES QUESTIONNAIRE

To get a sense of how well you create shared meaning through values, read each of the following statements and circle T for “true” or F for “false.”

1. We see eye to eye about what home means. **TF**
2. Our philosophies of what love ought to be are quite compatible. **TF**
3. We have similar values about the importance of peacefulness in our lives. **TF**
4. We have similar values about the meaning of family. **TF**
5. We have similar views about the role of sex in our lives. **TF**
6. We have similar views about the role of love and affection in our lives. **TF**
7. We have similar values about the meaning of being married. **TF**
8. We have similar values about the importance and meaning of money in our lives. **TF**
9. We have similar values about the importance of education in our lives. **TF**
10. We have similar values about the importance of fun and play in our lives. **TF**
11. We have similar values about the significance of adventure. **TF**
12. We have similar values about trust. **TF**
13. We have similar values about personal freedom. **TF**

14. We have similar values about autonomy and independence. **TF**
15. We have similar values about sharing power in our marriage. **TF**
16. We have similar values about being interdependent, being a “we.”
TF
17. We have similar values about the meaning of having possessions, of owning things (like cars, nice clothes, books, music, a house, and land). **TF**
18. We have similar values about the meaning of nature and of our relationship to the seasons. **TF**
19. We are both sentimental and tend to reminisce about things in our past. **TF**
20. We have similar views about what we want in retirement and old age. **TF**

Scoring: Give yourself 1 point for each “true” answer. If you score below 3, your relationship could stand some improvement in this area. In the following shared-meaning exercise, focus on the “values” section.

EXERCISE: USING THE FOUR PILLARS TO CREATE MEANING

This four-part exercise offers a list of questions for you to answer and discuss. There is a section for each of the four pillars of shared meaning: rituals, roles, goals, and values. This questionnaire is not designed to be completed in an evening or even a month. Consider it a starting-off point for many future discussions and fireside chats.

To make the best use of this exercise, focus on the pillar that most needs bolstering in your relationship. Take the questions one at a time. You can even write your thoughts about each question in a notebook. Then read and discuss each other’s entries. Talk about your differences on this issue as well as your areas of common ground that you can build upon. Find ways to honor both of your values, philosophies, and dreams. Although in many areas you may have separate needs, find ways to be supportive of each other’s. Where you differ fundamen-