

# Body & Soul

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## EVOLVE STOP, LOOK, LISTEN

Author-psychologist Helene Brenner, Ph.D.,  
on how to not lose yourself in a relationship

By Frances Lefkowitz

IN HELENE BRENNER'S RECENT book, *I Know I'm in There Somewhere: A Woman's Guide to Finding Her Inner Voice and Living a Life of Authenticity*, she says that women tend to lose touch with their innermost self and offers "innercizes" that help us get back in touch with what we feel, know, and want. *BODY & SOUL* caught up with Brenner, the director of the Women's Counseling and Psychological Services in Bethesda and Frederick, Maryland, to ask her about some of these ideas.

**Body & Soul: Let's talk about relationships. Is this where women most often, and most dangerously, lose touch with themselves?**

**Helene Brenner:** Yes. But there are things we can do to turn up the volume of our inner voice and reconnect with ourselves. For instance, knowing. Knowledge is power. Ask yourself what you know to be true in your very bones, and pay attention to that knowing. What do you know about this person? Pay attention to your body; if your stomach sinks or your body tenses, pay attention to that. If you notice that the person you're dating subtly undermines



you or your accomplishments, don't brush over it. If he or she can't handle you confronting it, then that tells you something, too.

**B&S: In intimate relationships—with lovers or parents or children—it's often so hard to differentiate our needs and desires from theirs. How can we identify our own true feelings?**

**HB:** If you feel pulled between what you want and what somebody else wants, try imagining that person is out of the room and then make the decision. Sometimes you still choose what pleases the other person. But it's so wonderful and empowering to know what you really want when you're making that choice, rather than feeling like you're not in the equation.

**B&S: Can you offer any tips for finding that inner voice when we feel conflicted?**

**HB:** That's where seeing yourself in parts is helpful, saying to yourself, "There's a part of me that feels this way, and a part that feels that way." Then find where the energy is, paying attention to your body and your voice. You'll notice that there's usually not energy in a "should."

**B&S: So the way to stay true to ourselves is to pay attention?**

**HB:** Yes. Keep listening; this is the most important thing, and acknowledge every feeling. You don't have to know the end point. People worry that if they know something then they immediately need to do something about it. But it's freeing to just know it.

This is not self-help; it's self-acceptance. It's not a quick fix, but accepting yourself—all of your feelings and desires, not just the ones you "should" have—is more effective and efficient than trying to fix what's "wrong" with you. At the moment you turn toward your inner self and listen to what it is trying to tell you, you are in a state of health and transformation. ∞