

## Relationships - Connection

This is where each of our stories start and play out over a lifetime. Relationships are our connections to everyone and everything, however functional or dysfunctional. I dare to say it is relationships, our connection to others and things that give our life purpose and meaning. I first realized the profound value of relationships when I read *Love and Survival* by Dr. Dean Ornish. In it he shows how relationships to our community make a huge difference in our health and welfare.

Even people who engage in unhealthy behaviors like drinking, smoking, poor diet, and lack of exercise can live long and healthy lives, apparently due to the support of their intimates and community. Amazing! On the other hand, those who have little support encounter a host of health and life difficulties and live shorter lives. In one study orphan babies who were denied human touch due to an epidemic scare *all* died. Are we, and more importantly, *do we feel*, part of, or apart from our Higher Power, ourselves, others, and all life and creation?

One of my favorite models of how we develop for better or worse is Erik Erikson's eight stages. From this we can see how we may gain basic trust, autonomy, initiative, identity, intimacy, generativity and integrity, and conversely, mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority, role confusion, isolation, stagnation, and despair. My guess is most everyone has some of each to some extent, small or large. Personally, I recall my formative years as isolated and confusing, and so have struggled with intimacy and self esteem issues most of my life.

I consider myself fortunate at that as many of my friends were actively abused either verbally, emotionally, physically, sexually, or spiritually, some receiving many, perhaps all of these. Even those from highly functional homes have suffered and carry wounds. In twelve step programs we acknowledge this entity as our wounded inner child. The difficulties we faced often were so common in our daily lives we came to see them as normal and internalized them deep within.

These forces often found a voice in our heads as a critical inner parent, a malevolent energy telling us how bad and worthless we are. To me, the saddest news is that without enlightenment of these dark forces, we are doomed to create and live through a false self and try to recreate and correct the problems of our youth with the people, places, and things least likely to achieve it. All is not lost however, for if we can find the strength to remove the years of bandages and armor we have built up to protect these wounds and endure the pain and suffering of cleaning and dressing them, we can heal. I am living proof. Only then can we find the voice of our own loving inner parent to rediscover, experience and enjoy our inner wonder child and live from our true self.

One of the best descriptions of Co-dependency is others first, ourselves second and Higher Power last. What really works best is H.P. first, ourselves second, then others. Why? Because Higher Power always knows best. A healthy Higher Power is infinite power, presence, our true parent, source and supply after all. All too often we forget and listen to the louder and more insistent voice of ego, ours or others. Do others really have our best interests at heart? Perhaps not, and even if they do, they could be wrong. This is also why Jung said that most of our problems are of a spiritual nature.

We have become cut off from our true source so have spent our lives lost and wandering for our real home. Another reason Higher Power comes first is because it is our connection to life, love, and all creation. Buddhism calls this Indras net, an infinite web with dew drops on every intersection reflecting every other forever. John Muir said "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" Also, "There is not a fragment in all of nature, for every relative fragment of one thing is a full harmonious unit in itself."

Thich Nhat Hanh calls this "Interbeing" and tells how a piece of paper contains the sunshine, rain, earth, and loggers in its essence. In Star Wars Yoda says "My ally is the Force. And a powerful ally it is. It is what gives a Jedi his power. It is the energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us. It binds the universe together."

Even the American government gives in to Higher Power and prints on every bill "IN GOD WE TRUST." Next we trust ourselves and our own experience. Buddha said "Believe nothing, no matter where you read it or who said it unless it agrees with your own reason and common sense." Emerson said "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself" as the summation of his excellent essay; Self Reliance. Einstein that "Never do anything against conscience, even if the state demands it," and "Few are those who see with their own eyes and feel with their own hearts."

When we come to others, we again connect to the whole through a higher law, a higher calling to selfless service, through communing with others in community. Yet we must avoid over dependence on others; co-dependency. Twelve steppers say "My Higher Power doesn't have two legs" because we have learned how others have gained power over us and we are working to be free. Before recovery we let others dictate what clothes we wore, foods we ate, friends and hobbies we had, on and on.

The classic example is when a codependent dies, someone else's life passes before them! This is a connection gone bad, one we learn to overcome and take responsibility and control of our own lives, of our own wants and needs. For a commentary of ego versus true self see my workshop "Happiness." Also if you would like to see what it might be like to recapture your wonder child (children actually), see my story "Homecoming."

In conclusion, I must say again, the quality of our relationships all come down to our feeling, our experience. Do we really feel and experience ourselves as part of, or apart from our Higher Power, ourselves, others, and all life and creation? It is so very important as this is what most often determines if we find happiness, purpose, and meaning in our lives.

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