

EXCERPT FROM

THE
Relationship
HANDBOOK

✓ *Family*

✓ *Romantic*

✓ *Professional*

✓ *Friendship*

How to Understand
and Improve
Every Relationship
in Your Life

KEVIN B. BURK

THE
Relationship
HANDBOOK

OTHER BOOKS BY KEVIN B. BURK

Astrology: Understanding the Birth Chart
(Llewellyn, 2001)

The Complete Node Book
(Llewellyn, 2003)

The Relationship Workbook
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HANDBOOK

How to Understand
and Improve
Every Relationship
in Your Life

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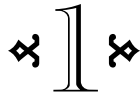
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«PART 1»
Understanding
Relationships



HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS PART I: BEING HUMAN

Relationships are the most important aspects of our lives. From the moment we arrive on Earth to the moment we depart, we experience relationships of all kinds with other individuals. Sometimes these relationships are supportive, and sometimes they present challenges. Some people seem to have a knack for maintaining strong and healthy relationships. The rest of us, however, often wish we had some help.

Consider this handbook a refresher course. You already know everything here. Nothing in this book is new information to you (with the possible exception of the Appendix, which covers the astrology of relationships). You may have forgotten some of it. You may not be consciously aware of some of it. You may approach some of this information from a different perspective. And some of it, you may not choose to accept or remember yet. But on some level, you will recognize that this information is true, and that you've simply forgotten much of it.

We all understand how to improve and enhance our relationships, because relationships are the most important part of being human. So, before we begin to look at relationships, let's review what it means to be human.

BEING HUMAN

Sometimes we need to be reminded of the truth of who we are. Certainly, most of us have forgotten our true natures.

Each one of us is a multi-dimensional, eternal aspect of the universe. We are whole and complete, and connected to all of creation. We are, in fact, aspects of All That Is¹. We are all-powerful because we are part of All That Is. We are each part of whatever name or concept we give to the Ultimate Creative Force in the Universe. We're also currently having a human experience, and we're having this human experience on the planet Earth. If you've ever had to change planes in Atlanta, it's kind of like that. In the grand scheme of our eternal existence, the human experience has a lot in common with a really long layover in Atlanta.

I don't mean to belittle our time here. In fact, we chose to have our human experiences because we wanted to explore the third dimension² and to gain a greater understanding of certain aspects of ourselves. It's simply not the most pleasant part of our journey. It does, however, share certain things in common with the layover in Atlanta: We often feel trapped, crowded, isolated, tired, stressed, and disoriented. Plus, we worry about losing our luggage.

No one is at his or her best when they're stranded in an airport waiting for a connecting flight. In much the same way, it's often difficult for us to connect with our true, divine nature when we're having our human experiences.

This is one of the drawbacks of the third dimension: In order to truly experience it, we have to pretend that we're a part of it. Shortly after we're born, we begin to forget that we are eternal, multi-dimensional beings, connected to all of creation. And the less we remember that truth, the more our human experience starts to look like Atlanta International Airport.

¹ Throughout this handbook, you will notice a variety of names and concepts that refer to the Ultimate Creative Force in the Universe. You may know this force as God, Goddess, Christ, Allah, Great Spirit, a Higher Power or Brahma, just to mention a few of the more popular names. When I refer to "All That Is," "the Creator," or "the Source," please know that I am referring to whatever name or concept you personally associate with the energy of Divine Love.

² The third dimension is the dimension of matter and form, where we currently reside. In order to incarnate in the third dimension (on Earth), the energy of our spirit condensed and compressed to become matter. Higher dimensions, which include the astral and etheric planes, vibrate at a much greater frequency. In the higher dimensions, matter once again becomes energy; we exist as pure spirit and light, free from the limitations and restrictions of form and matter that we experience in the third dimension. Plus, we get free cable.

Bernard Gunther describes it perfectly in his book, *Energy Ecstasy*:

“The game we play is Let’s Pretend and Pretend We’re Not Pretending.”³

Most of us have gotten so good at pretending we’re not pretending, that we’ve completely forgotten that we’re pretending in the first place. One of the goals of the game we play is to remember our true selves. We came here to learn how to master the third dimension. Our purpose is to wake up to our true spiritual natures, and to help everyone else on the planet to wake up as well.

Fortunately, we’re not alone—we are having a human experience with many other souls that are also having human experiences. And our relationships to others are the most important tools to help us to remember our true power and potential.

In order to do this, however, we have to learn how to master the ego.

The Ego

When we begin our human experiences, we’re given a very useful tool to help us to interact with the third dimension: the ego.⁴ The ego is entirely a third-dimensional construct. In a sense, we put on an “ego suit” so that we can experience and explore the third dimension from a unique and specific point of view. The ego helps us to pretend that we are individuals; more specifically, the ego helps us to pretend that we’re not, in fact, connected to each other as part of All That Is.

As tools go, the ego is very useful. The more we use it, the more uses we find for it. In fact, we can become pretty darned dependent on the ego without realizing it. To illustrate, it may help to think of our egos the way many of us think of our computers.

³ Gunther, page 1.

⁴ Many individuals who have had some experience with traditional psychology have a very specific understanding of the ego, usually based on Freud’s theory of the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*. The ego featured in this handbook is not quite the same thing. If you are used to the Freudian definition of the ego, it might help to substitute another name for the ego described in this handbook. I recommend calling it the “inner parent.”

More and more people today can't imagine living their lives without their computers (or PDAs, or cellular phones, or any of the hundreds of other technological tools that are supposed to make our lives easier). The more we use our computers, the more ways we find that they can help us. Computers started out as tools to help us be more productive at work, but they've become sources of entertainment for us as well. We can store and organize our lives on our computers! We can even use our computers to stay in touch with people. We can communicate with people across the entire planet without ever having to experience any actual human contact, in fact.

But soon, in subtle ways, the computer begins to take over our lives. We spend hours on the phone with technical support to make sure that our computers run the way we want them to. We feel isolated and cut off if our Internet access is disrupted and we can't check our e-mail. And let's not forget the crushing panic that comes when something serious goes wrong: If the hard drive goes bad, we could lose our entire *lives*.

Even if this doesn't describe you, you probably know someone that it *does* describe. We've become so dependent on our computers that they've stopped being just tools.

But consider this: What if it went even further than that? What if our computers were advanced enough that they could think? What if they were afraid of being damaged—or even of being shut down? What if they realized how dependent we had become on them? What if, in fact, our computers recognized that even though we still had the ultimate power over them, that we had *forgotten this*?

Oh, our computers would still have our best interest in mind, of course. Only what our *computers* believe is in our best interest may not really be what is in *our* best interest. And as long as we remained dependent on our computers, as long as we believed that we couldn't survive without them, they could control and manipulate us. Instead of serving our needs, computers would be fundamentally concerned with staying alive.

The HAL9000 computer in *2001: A Space Odyssey* is an excellent example of what can happen when we let a tool take control of our lives.

It's also a very good description of our relationships with our egos.

Our egos are tools that are designed to help us to pretend to be separate individuals so we can experience the third dimension. Ultimately, our egos are designed to help us to remember where we left our car keys, and not much else.

The problem is that our egos don't know this.

Our ego believes that its job is to protect us from what it perceives to be a very cruel and dangerous universe. Since the ego was created to help us maintain the illusion of separation from the Source, separation is all that the ego knows. The ego feels lost, isolated and alone. In an attempt to protect us from the pain of the world, the ego increases our sense of separation. Of course, the greater the separation, the more the pain. The more the ego tries to protect us from the pain of separation, the more pain it causes.

The ego's single greatest fear is death. Everything the ego does, it does to try to prevent itself from being destroyed. The ego can be destroyed—it's a product of the third dimension, and therefore it's fragile and finite. *We*, on the other hand, are eternal, multi-dimensional beings who can never die or be destroyed because we are a part of All That Is. We get into trouble when we start to identify with our egos and forget our true natures. When we start to believe that we are our egos, we see the world from our ego's point of view and experience fear and pain.

All fear comes from the ego. All fear, in fact, is directly related to the ego's fear of being destroyed. Fear can only exist when we believe that we are separated from the Source. The more we believe the ego, the more we believe we are separate from the Source, and the more we experience fear.

Only two states of being exist: fear and love. We experience fear when we listen to the ego and buy into the idea that we're separated from the universe. We experience love when we remember the truth that we are whole and complete. It's not possible to experience both states of being at the same time, although most of us are masters at switching between them almost instantly.

One of the most important lessons while we're having our human experience is to learn how to manage the ego. We have to keep it in its proper

place. When we remember that we're playing a game—a role-playing game in a very literal sense—we can remember that our egos are not our true selves. Then, we can reconnect with our higher selves, with our souls, and let ourselves be guided from a love-based perspective instead of from the ego's fear-based perspective.

In order to experience true spiritual connections in our relationships, we have to put our egos aside. When we keep our egos in check, our relationships can remind us what it feels like to be connected to another individual. Then, we can begin to remember that we're not only connected with that particular individual, but also with every other person on Earth, and with the rest of creation as well.

Human Evolution: Biological and Spiritual

Human beings are unique in all creation. On the one hand, we are self-aware, spiritual beings with souls. On the other hand, we're apes with cell phones. We have both a biological nature and a spiritual nature. Our evolution on the biological scale is complete; however, our evolution on a spiritual scale is still in its infancy. One of our current lessons is to learn how to shift our perspective from our biological needs to our spiritual needs.

The fundamental drive of all biological life is to reproduce. Survival of the individual is less important than survival of the species. Biologically, humans are useful until their mid-30s, at which point our reproductive capacities start to diminish, and *nature no longer cares about us*. When the average human lifespan was less than 40 years, this was not an issue. The problem is that most of us can expect to live into our 80s and beyond. If we're no longer useful or valuable on a biological level, then what are we expected to do with the remaining 40 years of our lives? More importantly, how do we adjust to the (biological) belief that we're past our prime?

Our spiritual drive, however, is to understand and embrace our place in the universe. Spiritual drives are all about the individual, and most of them have to do with defining and maintaining a sense that our individual lives have meaning. We need to know that we have made a difference. We want to leave our mark on the world and to be remembered long after we've completed our

human experience and moved on. Our egos are the tools we are meant to use to help us to discover our true nature. Unfortunately, when we were issued our egos, they didn't come with instruction manuals. We've tried to learn how to master the ego on our own, but we still have a long way to go.

The real challenge is that most of us are exploring our *spiritual* nature from a *biological* perspective. Biologically, our value as individuals is linked to our ability to reproduce. Our egos have built most of our belief systems from this perspective, and the result is our preoccupation with physical attractiveness, youth, and sex. In Chapter 10, we'll also see how this has resulted in the imbalance between men and women over the past 2,500 years, and the inability of any man to ask anyone for directions.

As we begin to evaluate our lives from a spiritual perspective, we recognize that our worth as individuals is based on the emotional and spiritual connections we share with others. We are measured by whom we love, and by who loves us. The more we love, support and nurture others and the more lives we enrich, the greater our legacy and the more valuable our individual contribution to the world. From a spiritual perspective, our lives are about our relationships.

THE NATURE OF REALITY

Most of us consider reality to be big, solid and fixed. It's *reality*, after all—it's what is *real*. It's not open to debate or discussion—it's simply the way things are. However, this thing that we call "reality" is not, in fact, real. Remember, the *true* reality is that there is no separation, that we are eternal, multi-dimensional aspects of All That Is. While we're having our human experiences, however, our perception of "reality" is usually quite different.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

A parable that comes from both the Eastern and Western traditions best describes our experience of reality. To paraphrase the Western version (from a poem by John Godfrey Saxe), six blind men encountered an elephant and attempt to understand its nature. The first approached the elephant's side and was convinced the elephant was like a wall. The second felt the elephant's tusk and believed the elephant was like a spear.

Grabbing the elephant's trunk, the third man proclaimed the elephant was like a snake. This made no sense to the fourth man, who after exploring the elephant's knee, insisted the elephant was entirely tree-like. The fifth, while grabbing the elephant's ear, decided the elephant was like a fan. And after inspecting the elephant's tail, the sixth blind man concluded the elephant was like a rope.

Needless to say, the six men proceeded to fight and to debate about the nature of the elephant. Each man was convinced that he alone understood the elephant, and that the others did not. Each man was partly correct: They had each experienced a small part of the elephant and drawn conclusions from their individual experiences. However, since none of the men had actually experienced the entire elephant, none of them had an accurate understanding of the reality of the elephant.

Even so, each man's experience of the elephant—and his understanding of the reality of the elephant—was absolutely real. Their experiences, and the words they used to describe their experiences to themselves, created and defined their reality. And our experiences, and the words that we use to describe our experiences to ourselves, create and define *our* reality as well.

It may help to consider that there is a *Reality*, which is the absolute truth of the Universe, and a *reality*, which is our ego-based, limited, third-dimensional experience of a small aspect of Reality. Our reality doesn't consist of truth, it consists of beliefs—and beliefs are nothing more than the words we use to describe the universe to ourselves.

The Birth of a Belief

Our egos are particularly concerned with our safety. They believe that they must protect us from the pain and suffering that they perceive in the universe. In order to protect us, our egos must be able to anticipate any situations that have the potential to cause pain, so that they can encourage choices that will help us to avoid the unpleasant experiences. Obviously, it's not possible to understand or anticipate every possible experience, so the ego looks to past experiences to anticipate future experiences. The ego creates frames of reference based on every experience in our lives. These frames contain our

evaluation of the experience, as well as information about the circumstances surrounding the experience. This way, the next time we encounter similar circumstances, we will know what to expect.

By the time we're adults, truly new experiences are few and far between. Almost every experience fits at least one of our frames, and therefore almost every experience is colored by our expectations and assumptions. In fact, we even have a frame that contains our expectations of new and unfamiliar experiences. We created this frame as infants, based on our earliest experiences with the world. If, on the whole, we enjoyed new experiences, we're more likely to seek out new experiences as adults. On the other hand, if we had unpleasant or painful experiences with the unknown, as adults we're likely to approach unfamiliar experiences with caution.

Of course, the frame of "unfamiliar experiences" contains sub-frames with different categories of unfamiliar experiences. We may have had a painful experience meeting new people, and so we have a lingering distrust of strangers. On the other hand, we may have had a very pleasurable series of experiences trying new foods, and so we're eager to sample exotic cuisines. The reverse can also be the case—we may tend to avoid unfamiliar foods but be eager to sample exotic strangers.

Whenever an experience fits an existing frame, we approach the experience armed with a set of expectations based on that frame. Instead of simply being in the moment and experiencing the experience, we evaluate the experience while we have it. We test our expectations. More accurately, we look for evidence that our expectations are correct, because it's so important to our egos that we can successfully anticipate the outcome of any experience.

Our egos have a tremendous need to be correct and to believe that they understand reality. This means that each time we have an experience, we're less and less objective about it. We *want* our expectations to be validated, and we're more likely to notice evidence that supports our expectations than we are to notice evidence that contradicts them.

The more we validate and reinforce our expectations, the more invested we become in maintaining that validation. We begin to filter out any details that don't support our expectations. Eventually, our expectations have been

validated so well and so often that we can't even imagine things being any other way. Our expectations have become beliefs.

The more aware we become of our frames, the more control we have over our experience of reality.

Instant Beliefs—Just Add Pain!

When I was twelve years old, my family took a vacation to Florida. Early in the vacation, we discovered a store that sold goat's milk fudge. This fudge qualified as one of the ultimate chocolate experiences in our lives, and we purchased several pounds of it, which my sister, my mother and I proceeded to consume with abandon. A few days later, I became violently ill. I had some of the worst nausea and stomach cramps I had ever experienced.

The thing is, the frame that I created around this experience put the blame squarely on the fudge. I recovered completely within 24 hours, but I had already created an unshakable belief that the goat's milk fudge was what made me sick. In fact, just thinking of the fudge, let alone being in the same room with it, was enough to make me violently nauseous all over again.

This one intensely unpleasant experience overrode all of the prior pleasant experiences I had had with chocolate in general and fudge in particular. Fudge was immediately re-framed—it no longer belonged in the "chocolate" frame, which contained pleasant expectations. Fudge now had its own frame—one so well protected that I couldn't even begin to question my expectations and assumptions about the "fudge experience." In an effort to protect me from experiencing pain, my ego had instantly created a new belief that fudge will make me sick. This belief was so powerful that even thinking about fudge actually *did* make me feel sick, which, of course, only reinforced the validity of the belief for me.

Our egos create most of our beliefs in an effort to protect us from being destroyed. Painful experiences will create instant beliefs.

This story illustrates how we create beliefs to protect us from experiencing pain—an extremely important point. But it also illustrates another key point about how we create beliefs and define our reality. I had created a powerful

new belief based on my experience, and that belief altered my reality in a significant way. *And I had absolutely no valid foundation for the belief.*

The fudge didn't make me sick—I had a stomach virus (which I then gave to my sister...all in all, it was a pretty crappy vacation). I understood this on an intellectual level—but that didn't matter. My ego needed to find some way to convince itself that I could avoid that kind of pain again, and the fudge was the perfect scapegoat. Viruses can't be controlled or anticipated—they're fundamentally threatening to our egos, because there's simply not much we can do to avoid them. *Fudge*, on the other hand, *can* be controlled, or more specifically, avoided, in a very concrete and definite manner.

Our egos need to believe that they understand the way the universe works—even if this belief is largely unfounded. Our egos need to believe that they are in control and can protect us from pain and ensure our continued survival. And if maintaining this belief requires that we believe lies and ignore the rational, objective reality, that's what our egos will do. It was far more painful for my ego to accept the possibility that I could contract a painful or deadly virus at any time than it was to believe that the goat's milk fudge had made me sick.

It took me 20 years before I would eat another piece of fudge—and I *still* have to remind myself that there's no difference between fudge and any other kind of chocolate that I enjoy before I'm willing to eat it.

The Awesome Power of Words

Since our reality and our beliefs are created and defined by our words and thoughts, this means that words and thoughts can create beliefs without being connected to specific experiences. As children, a great deal of our understanding of reality comes from the things that our parents or other authority figures have told us. These words shape and define our reality.

We make so many of our life choices based on who we believe we are. And who we believe we are has a great deal to do with who other people told us we were when we were children. Think about all of the things we were told about ourselves as children—both the supportive and the critical. Every one of these statements contributed to our reality. Whether we were told that we were

good at sports, we were bad at math, we were charming, or we were simply not good enough, these words became a part of our world. The beliefs we created from these words governed our choices and our expectations for the rest of our lives. How many of us have things we long to do with our lives but believe that we lack some fundamental quality required to accomplish our dreams?

CHANGE THE WORDS AND CHANGE THE WORLD

If we want to change our lives in any way, all we need to do is to change our words, thoughts and beliefs. When we change the words, we change the world.

Over the course of this handbook, you may discover a number of beliefs that no longer support you. By following this simple, three-step process, you can change your beliefs. By consciously creating beliefs that support us, we can change our reality and enhance our lives.

Awareness

The first and most important step towards changing our beliefs and improving our lives is to become consciously *aware* of our beliefs. We must identify each thought that shapes our experiences. We have to *name* our thoughts. We must become conscious of the exact words that we have been using to create our realities. This is the first step towards mastering our minds.

So much of our life is governed by our *unconscious* thoughts, beliefs and patterns. We have lived with so many of these thoughts for so long that we believe that they're actually *real*. We tell ourselves "that's just the way things are." Many of these thoughts are beliefs about who we are and what we're entitled to—and almost all of these beliefs deny the truth of who we are, limit our potential and cut us off from the source of our happiness and prosperity.

We must become aware of our thoughts and beliefs. This handbook is designed to support our awareness.

Ownership

Once we've become aware of a belief, the second step is to *own* it. We must accept it. We must take personal responsibility for it. We must recognize that

the belief belongs to us, and that it is a part of who we are. Most importantly, we must accept that *we created the belief*.

This process is *simple*, but not always *easy*. We have to accept and acknowledge that *we* are responsible for creating beliefs that are often negative, painful, and limiting. On a conscious level we tell ourselves that we would *never* do this. Why on earth would we choose to believe that we are unworthy, damaged, unlovable, unskilled, unlucky, or any of the millions of other possibilities? Strange as it seems, even our most negative, painful beliefs were created to serve and support us. Every single one of our beliefs exists because the ego is trying to protect us from pain. As painful as the belief itself may be, the ego believes that the pain that the belief shields us from is infinitely greater. Just because these beliefs no longer serve us, doesn't mean that they are bad or wrong.

It's often easier to own a belief when we are able to identify the origins of that belief. If we understand that we created a belief to help us cope with a particular experience, we can accept how that belief served us at the time. This process can also help us to uncover beliefs we created because of things we were told as children.

While it's often helpful to explore where and when we first created a belief, we have to be careful. Our egos will encourage us to deflect the responsibility for the beliefs to protect us. It's one thing to recognize that we believe that we're not worthy of being loved (for example) because our parents didn't spend enough time with us. It's quite another to *blame* our parents for creating this belief and ruining our lives. Our parents didn't create the belief—*we* did. *We* interpreted an experience, created assumptions around it, developed expectations and created the belief. And until we accept this, we can't change that belief.

Our egos can also interfere with the ownership process by encouraging us to *identify* with the limiting belief. The ego can trick us into reinforcing our negative beliefs, by turning those beliefs back on us. Essentially, we tell ourselves that we're unworthy because we created a belief that we're unworthy. We beat ourselves up for beating ourselves up. Without *awareness*, the ego has us coming and going.

If we become aware that we've fallen into an ego trap, we simply use our awareness to escape the trap. We need only remember that every belief, no matter how limiting, served us well at one time. Many beliefs were created to help us survive difficult and painful situations in our past. However, we're no longer in those situations. Our circumstances have changed, and we have more experience and new skills that can serve us better now. We've simply outgrown the need for the old beliefs. We can release them because we have more elegant options available to us now.

Choice

The third and final step is *choice*. Once we are *aware* of our beliefs and *own* them, we have absolute control over them. We can now *choose* to alter our beliefs, and change our reality. We have the power to change our lives completely in an instant—we simply need to *choose* to do so *now*. I'm sure you've heard similar motivational statements from any number of sources. While it is essentially true that we can change our lives with a simple choice, it's also important to read the fine print: We have to continue to make that same choice over and over and over and over and over again. The *now* when we chose to change our lives is already in the past. We have to keep choosing until our new choices, expectations, and beliefs have become habit. We have to continue to choose until our new choices become second nature to us.

Our past experiences certainly influence us. They shape our beliefs, and our expectations. As long as we continue to let ourselves be guided by the past, we will create similar experiences in the future. *The past does not equal the future—unless we choose to carry the past with us.* The cliché, “there's no time like the present” is not entirely correct. The truth is that there's no time *except* the present. The only time that matters is *now*. The past is irrelevant; the future does not exist yet. The only place where we can act, where we can create, where we can *choose* is *now*.

While the past does not need to influence or shape the future, many of the choices and thoughts and expectations that we held in the past are old habits—and as the saying goes, old habits are hard to break. This is the one arena where

the progress of technology has almost eliminated a perfectly good metaphor. Remember vinyl records? Those big things that came before CDs? The groove of a record represents our old patterns. Records could get scratched—that's one of the reasons that CDs are so popular, actually—and a scratch represents a change or a break in the old pattern. The only way to truly change the old pattern is to interrupt it enough times that a new pattern starts to form. Our patterns are exactly like grooves in records. The older the pattern, the deeper the groove, and the more interruptions it will take before we make any permanent changes in the pattern. Each time we notice that we have reverted back to our old, negative behaviors, we choose to take a different path.

Sometimes we can get so caught up in our old patterns that it seems like we can't stop ourselves. It's essential that we do not beat ourselves up for not being able to change old habits and behaviors on the first try (or even the second or third try)! We may not have completely eliminated the pattern, but we did change it: The fact that we were *aware* that we were acting out an old pattern is, in itself, a change in that pattern. Each time we encounter the pattern, we will become aware of it sooner. Eventually, we will also be able to interrupt the pattern. And when we can interrupt our old patterns, we have the power to choose different, more elegant and supportive responses.

THE “F-WORD”

We have one more concept to explore to complete our survey of the “human” part of human relationships. This concept is essential—we must learn how to master it if we want to experience the levels of joy, happiness, love and prosperity that are our birthright. Many of us, however, resist this concept. We use it sparingly, if at all, and occasionally, we won't even consider it as an option. In fact, for many of us, this concept is so emotionally charged that I hesitate to even name it, because if I call it anything other than the “f-word” it could put our egos on high alert.

You see, in many cases, avoiding this concept is the ego's front line defense—an effort to protect us from experiencing pain. The ego believes that if we embraced the “f-word” we would be defenseless at best, and at worst, we would be destroyed completely. Of course, it doesn't help that most of

us have a somewhat ego- and fear-based understanding of the “f-word” that makes it less than appealing. The truth is that embracing the “f-word” is the secret to experiencing genuine freedom in our lives.

So, what is the “f-word”? Forgiveness.

In order to improve our lives, our relationships, and our reality, we *must* learn and practice forgiveness. We must forgive freely, liberally, and often. We must forgive everything and everyone—especially the people we are the most reluctant to forgive. But let’s take a few moments to consider the true nature of forgiveness.

Guy Williams, a friend of mine who also happens to be a minister of Religious Science, suggested this take on the nature of forgiveness. Forgiveness simply means to *give as before*. When we are angry with someone, when we harbor resentment towards someone, we have stopped giving to him or her. We no longer give that person our love or our compassion. They have betrayed us and caused us pain. And we know what happens anytime we have a painful experience, right? Our egos immediately create a new frame and a new belief in an effort to protect us from experiencing that pain again in the future.

Our egos are reluctant to accept the truth that sometimes unpleasant and painful experiences are unavoidable. Our egos need to believe that they can protect us. Our egos need a scapegoat—something (or someone) concrete that can be identified, isolated and avoided. Holding onto our anger and resentment keeps us separate from the person or persons who betrayed us. This, in turn, reinforces the illusion that we are separate from those individuals, and distances us from the truth that there *is* no separation: We are all aspects of All That Is. The less we remember the truth of who we are, the more our essential spiritual and life lessons seem to present challenges rather than opportunities. Everyone always does the best they can at any given time, and that’s all we can ever expect.

It’s worth noting that when we choose to hold a grudge and to remain angry, we carry the pain of the betrayal with us. We experience a small amount of pain each time we think of it. The ego actually *wants* us to experience this pain, because the *little* pain will serve to remind us how important it is to avoid the

big pain. And the only way to avoid the *big* pain is to protect ourselves from close, supportive relationships with those who have hurt or betrayed us.

Frequently, the person that we most need to forgive is our self. We betray ourselves each time we listen to the ego and forget the truth of who we are. And the more we betray ourselves, the more our egos try to protect us (from ourselves, yet!) by strengthening the illusion of separation from the Source. And of course, the more we believe the illusion of separation, the more we betray ourselves, and experience pain. The way to break out of this vicious circle is to forgive ourselves—to “give as before.” We must learn to express unconditional love and compassion for ourselves. As we experience this love and compassion, we will reconnect with our true selves. And the more we’re able to forgive ourselves, the more we’re able to forgive others.



HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS PART 2: RELATIONSHIPS

Now that we've covered the human part of our overview of human relationships, we can consider the relationship part of the equation. We enjoy a wide variety of relationships in our lives, and each type of relationship makes us aware of different facets and aspects of ourselves. Ultimately, each relationship has the potential to make us aware of how we buy into our egos and our fears, and the illusions of separation in our lives. Each relationship in our lives can help us to remember and reconnect with our true selves, and free us from the pain and fear that comes from listening to our egos.

WHAT ARE RELATIONSHIPS?

Relationships are first and foremost ways that we can learn our spiritual lessons in the most effective and efficient manner. This applies to *all* types of relationships, not only to romantic and/or sexual relationships.

We must always remember the **Universal Law of Relationships**:

Our partners in relationships are our mirrors: They reflect our own issues back to us.

Nothing in any relationship is *ever* about the other person. It's *all* our own stuff.

Always.

It's *never* about the other person.

Everything we've ever admired in another person—everything we've ever hated about another person—it's *all our own stuff*. When people upset us, when our partners “push our buttons,” the lesson is to make us *aware* that we have a button in the first place. Once we've acknowledged this, we can accept responsibility for the button, and *own* it. Then, we can *choose* to release the button. Once we've released a button it can no longer be pushed by anyone.

This applies to *every single relationship in our lives*. It applies to our romantic relationships, to our professional relationships, to our family relationships, to the relationships we have with the people we meet on the street. *Every single relationship*. This, in fact, is the entire reason we *have* relationships—they help us to recognize and acknowledge the parts of ourselves that we have yet to accept or integrate. What we do instead is give these parts of ourselves away. We project our own issues onto others and experience these lessons as if they were coming from outside us. And don't forget: our partners are doing the same thing to us. So, while we're learning about ourselves from them, they're learning about themselves from us.

Because our relationships are designed to help us to learn our spiritual lessons, relationships will last as long as both individuals are learning their lessons from each other at the same rate. If one person learns their lessons, and the other person does not, the relationship will end. Each person will create a new relationship, where they can continue to grow at their own pace. If we've learned our lessons, we'll attract a partner who will give us the chance to move on to the next set of lessons. If we didn't learn our lessons, we'll attract a partner who will give us another chance to learn our current lessons.

Of course, relationships end for many different reasons. We've all had friendships that were close and intimate for years and then seemed to fade away. In the work environment, we can be transferred or promoted, or change jobs, any of which would sever our workplace relationships and create new relationships in our new workplace. And we've had romantic relationships that ended because our life circumstances changed. However, the principles

are the same. If we learned our lessons in our old relationships, we'll move on to our next set of lessons in our new relationships. And if we didn't learn our lessons in our old relationships, our new relationships will look just like our old relationships did, giving us another chance to learn our lessons.

RELATIONSHIP NEEDS

Abraham Maslow first presented the theory that the key to human behavior is our needs. Everything we do in life has to do with finding ways to meet our unsatisfied needs, and we have to satisfy the lower needs before we can begin to address the higher needs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is usually represented as a pyramid (as shown in Figure 1), because Maslow believed that the lower needs take precedence over the higher needs. He theorized that until we meet our lower needs, we won't be concerned with meeting our higher needs. He also believed that even when we've started to meet our higher needs, if any of our lower needs are interrupted, our focus will immediately shift to the lower needs. In other words, when we're laid up with the flu, we're more concerned

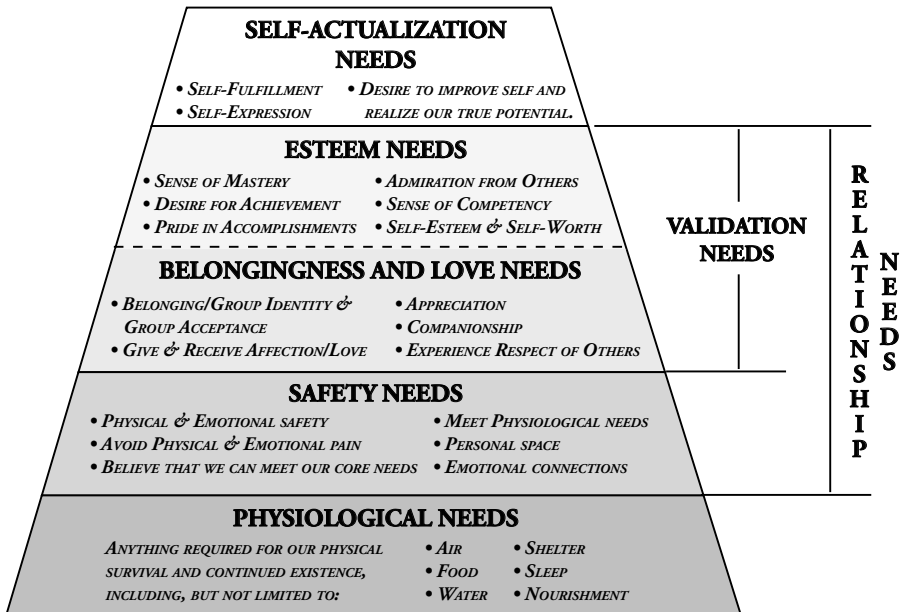


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (With Annotations)

with regaining our health (physiological needs) than we are with expressing our individual creativity (self-actualization needs).

Maslow's theories give us a starting point for understanding human relationships. We will build on Maslow's ideas to create a context for understanding and improving our relationships.

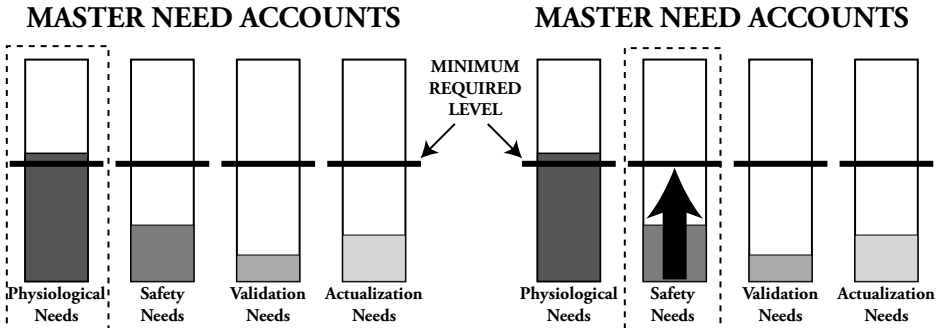
In any relationship, we're concerned with meeting two categories of needs: *safety* and *validation*. "Validation" needs encompass two levels of Maslow's hierarchy: the "Belongingness and Love" needs and the "Esteem" needs. As long as we feel safe and validated, we will be happy in the relationship. If our safety needs or our validation needs are not being met, we will experience problems in the relationship. *All* relationship problems stem from either safety needs or validation needs not being met.

But what about communication (I hear you cry)? Isn't communication the foundation of good relationships? Of course it is. Communication is essential in any relationship. Communication lets us inform our partners that our safety or validation needs are not being met. Communication is a means to an end. Relationships are all about meeting our needs.

Need Bank Accounts

We have a separate bank account for each of our needs. We are responsible for maintaining a minimum balance in each account on our own. As each account reaches or exceeds the minimum level, our attention shifts to filling the next higher account, as shown in Figure 2. Notice that even though the Safety Needs in Figure 2 haven't reached the minimum balance, we still have some credit in the "higher" need accounts, Validation and Self-Actualization. Even so, our primary objective is to meet our safety needs and bring that account to its minimum balance. We may make incidental deposits in the other accounts, but for the most part, we won't be conscious of the balance or activity in those accounts.

It is possible for a surplus in one of the higher need accounts to compensate for a deficit in one of the lower need accounts—at least for a short time. The reason that falling in love can make us do so many foolish things is that when we fall in love, our validation needs are being met so well that our validation



Once we've reached the minimum level for ...we focus our attention on bringing our physiological needs... safety needs up to the minimum level.

Figure 2: Maintaining the Minimum Balance in our Need Accounts

account is bursting at the seams. We're then able to ignore any deficits in our safety account in order to be with the object of our affections. We can even overcome deficits in our most basic, physiological needs when a higher need account is full. When we're consumed with completing a project—usually one that requires a certain degree of skill and creativity—we're meeting our self-actualization needs in a big way, and we're able to go without food or sleep while we're immersed in that activity. As soon as we take a break, however, our physiological needs will demand to be met, and we'll suddenly realize just how hungry and/or tired we are.

Relationship Needs Bank Accounts

Our master safety and validation accounts motivate us in every aspect of our lives, and we are responsible for maintaining a minimum daily balance in these accounts on our own. In addition to these master accounts, we also have separate safety and validation accounts for each relationship in our lives (see Figure 3). Each of these relationship accounts has its own minimum balance requirements of safety and validation. When a relationship account exceeds the minimum balance of safety or validation, we're able to make a deposit in our master accounts.

However, if the balance of the safety or validation accounts in one of our relationship accounts falls below the minimum level, we will make a withdrawal from our master accounts to cover the deficit. This can create

