

UsingYour Relationships to Realize Real Life

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The greatest, most abundant resource on planet Earth is also its least understood and utilized. Its unlimited supply is found virtually everywhere, anytime, and under all circumstances, even though few recognize its real value. What is this most precious collective resource? It is our relationships.

Consider these truths: It is within relationships that we grow as individuals in everything valuable, because it is through them that we become stronger and wiser, allowing us to realize a love that transcends our unseen self-limiting self-interests. Yet, even though we may acknowledge the existence of this path to self-perfection, the essential mystery of exactly how to use this endless resource remains obscured.

What do we have to do to change the balance sheet of our lives so that for every measure of impatience and intolerance there may be at least an equivalent sum of compassion and consideration? How do we learn to use our relationships with others to realize a new kind of relationship with ourselves wherein we are able to discover that who we really are is all we need to be?

Your willingness to work your way through the twelve special practices of the following inner exercise—to strive to employ these higher ideals in your relationships with others—will reward you with the Real Life your heart longs for. The main thrust of these special practices is to show you how to use each developing moment in your relationships with family, friends, and coworkers to consciously change your relationship with yourself. Only a moment's consideration will show us the wisdom of this unusual inner work.

With few exceptions, the usual focus of our attention and interactions with others is centered on our self and the fulfillment of its desires. "How do I feel about you?" "What do I want from him?" or "When will she realize that I know best?" In other words, the mindset of the false self, under most circumstances, is "Me first." By forever placing its own considerations before considering any other, it remains the master of its own universe, even if all that revolves through it is its own imagined importance.

The great inner life lesson to be learned in working with the following twelve suggested practices is

that what we put first in our lives is our first relationship with life. And it is this relationship that secretly determines the nature of all others in our lives. Through our willingness to work at placing our usual self in "second place," we agree not only to change the way we see our relationships, but we have also agreed to be changed by the truths our new relationships will inevitably show us about us.

Be as alert to what you can do to help someone else in any given moment as you are critically aware of others for failing to notice your immediate needs.

Let anyone who wants to psychologically defeat you have his victory, and do it without revealing that you chose to give him the last word.

In any moment of consequence, be as willing to see that you may be wrong as you are convinced that you are always right.

Do whatever act of kindness you may be moved to do for another person without drawing attention to your deed, or to yourself for having done it.

Look for ways to make moments work to the advantage of someone else besides yourself

When gathered with friends or family, instead of competing for the spotlight, voluntarily help to shine it on someone whom you know its light will emotionally lift or otherwise encourage.

Even when you know that you are solidly in the right, rather than rub it in, sacrifice your righteousness.

Should a sarcastic or unkind remark pop into your mind to tease, torment, or in any way "trash" another person, try swallowing it first to see how it tastes before you dish it out.

Whatever it might be when your "moment in the sun" arises—such as being acknowledged or applauded for a deed well done—if you have the choice, give the best or better portion away.

Let there be times when you don't tell someone everything you know about her problem, even if your understanding of it is better than hers.

When feeling displeased with someone, don't show your displeasure, and save any necessary correction for a later time.

There are times when the greatest strength (and kindness) one can possess is to allow another his weakness without pointing it out or otherwise punishing him for it.

Just a few last thoughts about this exercise to take with you: Remember that all spiritual practices are a means to self-discovery, and that discouragement, or any form of frustration, are secret indicators of some end we have in mind that has been thwarted. Lastly, keep in mind that everything true we discover about ourselves enlarges our relationship with life, and that there is no end to these relationships . . . just as Real Life is endless.

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