

illuminating Relationships: Dancing in the Light

**He who experiences the unity of life sees his own Self in all beings, and all beings in his own Self, and looks on everything with an impartial eye.
~ Bhagavad-Gita Gita**

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field....I will meet you there. ~Rumi

I have talked to many people over the years, from the most traditional and dogmatic of religious seekers to the most out there on the spiritual plane. They all see spirituality as the way to inner peace as their traditions help them to transcend the ordinary and connect to higher consciousness. Growing in spirituality helps to expand our sense of purpose and transcend our ordinary lives, consequently questioning and integrating beliefs and values with actions. During this process we develop a tolerance of opposites and contradictions that exist within our world and belief systems. The same can be said true of a spiritual relationship.

Within our individual spiritual development, as we become more, a feeling of comfort exists within us as our place in the universe and a connection to something larger than us unfolds. We are happier, more peaceful, and realize full spiritual wellness. Individual happiness includes an expanded sense of Self as it relates to our core beliefs and how we and our beliefs fit in a bigger picture. The more global we get, the larger our scope, the more we need to integrate it all to make sense of it.

Meditation is useful to access our higher consciousness and inner Self. This place within us has incredible power, clarity and peace. Centering meditation allows our mind to open and fill with awareness and observation. While guided meditation moves spirit along by enhancing inner imagery to create expansion of perspective, just like opening up the windows or doors of a house, instead we're opening up our mind and the windows of our lives. We are allowing the expanded vista that enables healing and change.

Once we know who we are today and where we are going, we can then connect better to those around us. Whether we are in long term relationships or newly together, it makes sense that we share our understanding of that inner self as we know it. A highly satisfying partnership begins or is enhanced by integrating spirituality into the relationship, creating a deep spiritual foundation for further growth as a couple. When two people in a relationship both believe in the greatness and importance of spirit, their lives become more unified, moving easily and effortlessly towards each milestone on their path.

When relationships are based on traditional religions, it seems more obvious how belief systems might play out. However, when there isn't clear-cut dogma to draw on or the relationship has transcended the dogma, reevaluation might be the next

step. A couple that hasn't agreed upon a particular spiritual path or doesn't reflect a cohesive belief system can feel disconnected. Clarifying one's spiritual foundation can be the beginning of a whole new level of relatedness, bringing a close relationship closer, inspiring new depth and freshness into living. All aspects of lives are enhanced as we become more of who we are individually and together. How does one approach such an awesome undertaking? How do we connect the dots between two individual inner lives? The path is obvious on one level and mysterious on another, stay with me as we follow this intimate path from both perspectives...

Women's needs have been examined from different viewpoints over the years, but the essential elements most wanted of a relationship remain the same. What is most consistently affirmed is our need for communication and intimacy. Communication is intimate when it targets, in a nonjudgmental way, both information and feelings. Sometimes our communications get into trouble when discussions leave one or the other out or we blend feelings, behaviors, and information targeting the other person. Clear and clean communication is the first step to enhancing spirituality, because the likelihood of finding deep spiritual connection when feelings are festering under the relationship is difficult at best.

As for intimacy, we sometimes confuse it with nurturing, but intimacy is not nurturing. Intimacy is an activity between equals, a reciprocal sharing of feeling and thought. While nurturing is a 'caretaking' activity that may feel warm and fuzzy, and may have its place, it also can be controlling. While these are two very distinct activities, many women discuss these activities together, as if the two were combined and enmeshed into a single exercise. How we define the exercise may be very different. Webster defines intimacy as "to put into, announce or declare..." that is, to put our masks aside, just be ourselves with another person, and this builds relationship.

What is intimacy for you...historical continuity, shared feelings, or something else? We could discuss relationships composed of different gender mixes, but let's look at traditional relationships. When we pin a traditional man down for definition, he is likely to say that sex is his most intimate activity, and communication and feelings are at the low end of the spectrum.

Actually, connecting words with feeling and emotion can be difficult and frightening for anyone these days. But for men, this fear begins with being brought up to think he must always be in control, the rational man, the archetype of John Wayne personified. He may feel that the verbal exchanges tinged with emotion seem like conflict, exposing vulnerability that he is not ready to share. Men find conflict easier in the Board Room* or on the athletic field, then in relationship.

Women on the other hand, need more of what comes before intimacy and communication. Their needs vary over time, but all include affection (eye contact,

touching, warmth, etc.), and open, honest conversations. This sets the stage to create the intimate connections that we are all looking for. Communication occurs over time through an open and honest sharing of thoughts and ideas regarding things that play out in our every day lives. Without these discussions, we never get to know the *real* us. These warm and revealing conversations are the cornerstones of relationship. This is what is meant by connecting with women “between the ears.” Men would do well to heed the message, because this is the best way to prepare and set the stage for romance.

So there you have it, within the traditional relationship, he needs control and she needs connection. Here lies the first major stumbling block towards shared needs. An awareness of these differences is the first step towards spiritual equilibrium within relationship. Each offering of self to the other is a gift of trust, and a step towards authenticity as we learn more about who we are individually and together. As we progress towards this balance, we move back and forth, swaying to and fro, negotiating a rhythm between our need for connectedness and our need for autonomy.

Each of us has a different understanding of the beat that must be maintained in order to keep this dance alive. We sometimes think we know and many times we guess, mostly we negotiate without really communicating clearly how we feel. How much is negotiable to enable the dance to continue? Within this dance we have the opportunity to move our relationship from ordinary to spiritual illumination, into a dance of light energy.

Revealing core Self is all about communicating, and within the realm of communication, we see that balance more clearly. During this time we are either involved or self contained. Our needs are conflicted between participation and independence, to be connected and to be separate simultaneously. This is a way of thinking about each other that must come full circle for an interdependent partnership to unfold. We must serve both needs at once in all we say and do. Because of this double bind, communication will never be perfect. We have no choice but to keep trying to balance independence and involvement, continually making adjustments as we list from one side to another.

Making adjustments is clearly an essential component to deep spiritual communication and communion. As a result, it helps to first understand that men and women communicate very differently. Paraphrasing Deborah Tannen, Ph.D., most men talk to convey information and have a greater need for independence and power. Women, on the other hand, typically talk to be connected with others and to share feelings. We have a greater need to be involved with others; therefore, we are more interested in negotiating to resolution. Unfortunately, it also makes us appear unsure of ourselves, fueling the fires of powerlessness.

Because women have a greater need to be involved, they tend to be more knowledgeable about their feelings as well as the psychology and culture of men. Some women seem to possess a Ph.D. when it comes to emotions and what men want. While men typically do not know how they feel--they know how they think, but not how they feel. So, they end up feeling uncomfortable when asked to participate with women who may be more experienced in the arena of emotions. This is no surprise, since men are not socially rewarded for their efforts to know about their feelings or contribute to the development of better relationships. They are content to view us as one of those *mysterious phenomenon's* of life, the *feminine mystique*, and we allow the mystery to persist.

There are many paradoxical feelings in our spiritual connections to others and all of these allow us to learn about ourselves. Everyday we look into the eyes of our partner and see a reflection of self. That reflection grooms us and helps us grow in our spiritual development. Interestingly enough, keeping spirit balanced and our relationship integrated helps us personally to evolve our sense of self. A surprising and little known fact is that women can be frightened of intimacy too, especially in today's life styles. It is difficult to take off that mask and be who we really are with others, sharing that inner life that perhaps we are just getting to know.

While meditation is the obvious choice for individuals who want to know their own inner life; it is much more powerful done together. Combining both communication and meditation helps us to prepare each other for a spiritual depth of renewal that is an amazing shared journey inward, leading us to know the other in an extraordinarily different way. Our higher consciousness connects intuitively to allow a perspective of life that we may not be aware of on a conscious level. As we suspend judgment we are empowered to unite and play out this mystery of life as we bridge the gap of the unknown.

The real challenge for those in partnership is getting to know and remain true to *us*, while letting the *other* into our world. We are the perfect Self that we can be at this time in our development. Celebrate the essence of that Self by allowing all that we are full acknowledgment. When we accept and are accepted without judgment, we grow to the next level in our development. We allow the differences to melt away, while we connect to the similarities, linking to each other through common ground.

This shifting in and out of self knowledge can be likened to the struggle of the caterpillar growing and being nourished within its cocoon. We assimilate enough understanding to know what enhances development and what needs to stay dormant to keep our social systems in place. Much like the butterfly, we have the possibility to emerge as the radiant being of energy and light that we are at our core, illuminating the way to others in a swirling dance of light. We are then one with the Universe and each other.

(*For another article on this theme see *Leading the Sexes to Successful Communication*)

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