

# **Relationships as a Mirror and Basis for Support**

**John Lord**

I believe the desire for relationships is embedded in the human spirit. Whether you are an introvert or an extrovert, you need a relationship with yourself and with others. I have found that these two elements of relationships affect each other very profoundly. Jack Kornfield has written that, “most ancient cultures know...we can actually converse with our heart as if it were a good friend.” In modern life, Kornfield notes that daily life is often so busy that we have lost the art of taking time to be converse with our hearts. I know that when I am connected with my own heart, it is easier to be in solitude, and also easier to be with others. In this sense, our relationships mirror ourselves.

In another sense, relationships are deeply social. It has been shown that most people interact with dozens, sometimes hundreds of people each day. I have found it helpful to think of these relationships in different ways. Some of these interactions are commercial relationships, where we exchange or buy something from another person. On my way to work, I may interact with six people as a pick up a coffee, buy a newspaper, get gas in my car, and pick up my dry cleaning. Jeremy Rifkin has demonstrated that our commercial relationships have been increasing. While these friendly encounters can add meaning to my day, we must be wary that all of our

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relationships do not become “commodified.” It has been shown that to live a full, healthy life, commercial relationships should form only a small part of our relationship maps. Other relationships come from my work life, others from the community groups I belong to, and still others from family and close personal friends.

Many citizens have not been afforded the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships. For many of us, developing relationships with self and others must be an intentional activity. To nurture my relationship with myself, I have found that I require solitude, and time to meditate. I am also enriched when I connect with nature on a regular basis, and physical activity helps my body and mind stay tuned. What works for you? What do you do to help yourself be mindful, energized, and in touch with your heart?

I have found “community” a great source of meaningful relationships with others. There are three ways to think about community and relationships. First, see how your neighbourhood might be a source of relationships. Second, reach out and invite someone in your personal network to have a coffee, go for a walk, have a conversation. We all have personal networks that can be intentionally further developed. These networks are the source of future good friendships! Finally, find a group or community association where you can participate in something that you care about. In every community there are hundreds and hundreds of associations, where people form relationships around common interest, whether it be culture, art, sports, music, outdoors, social change, self-help or whatever. What do you do to connect with your community? Is this a source of meaningful relationships?

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There is a paradox in relationships. For most of us, meaningful relationships do not just happen, even though the mystery of connecting with someone special still happens. Generosity turns out to be the best way to nurture relationships. By giving to another, we learn how to express ourselves and connect on a deeper level. This returns us to the heart, because giving means having a generous heart. Studies have shown that giving can be healing. Similarly, there is growing evidence that people who have meaningful relationships and personal networks that they can count on lead healthier lives.

Relationships, whether companionships, friendships, acquaintances, intimate relationships, or even commercial relationships, are being recognized as a vital part of a good quality of life. For some citizens, relationship development may mean helping people repair or construct a personal network. The act of facilitating relationships and building welcoming communities should be a key component of policy and practice.

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