

## **The Social Sphere of Spiritual Life**

*The social sphere affects us more deeply than any other factor in our lives. A single happy social exchange does wonders to uplift the spirit, while a negative interaction can ruin our day. There's a good reason that our human connections matter so much: God planned it that way! Spiritually, we are children of God who were CREATED to need each other. We need to serve each other, to love each other. And eventually, in spiritual fulfillment, we come to realize our oneness with each other.*

### **Spiritual growth is a team sport**

The social sphere plays a major role in God's plan for spiritual development. A wise man said, "If God had meant us to go it alone, God would have made one planet for every person." To that we would add, "If God had meant us to grow alone, God would not have created so many wonderfully social methods for spiritual ascent."

So many spiritual blessings flow through social channels. Clearly, God didn't intend spirituality to be a solitary quest. Take a moment to consider the marvelous value of relationship for spiritual ascent, and we think you'll agree: Spiritual growth is a team sport.

Let's start with learning. It is rightly said that we get most of our education in the school of experience. Both directly and indirectly, we learn many spiritual lessons from human associates and from our experiences of social relating. Also, social engagement offers some of the best possible opportunities to put what we've learned into practice.

What about the personal relationship to God? It is often said, and truly, that our personal relationship with God is our spiritual life. But every spiritual tradition also states, in one way or another, that our relationship to God is inseparable from our relationship to man: as we relate to man, we relate to God.

And let us remember the undeniable relevance of love and service to spiritual progress. Truly, the social sphere is fertile ground not only for growth, but also for sharing the fruits of our growth socially. What use is our spirituality unless we express it actively, for the benefit of the human family?

Surely, it's to everyone's advantage to use social means to further spiritual growth. This article will help you do that.

## A Quick Look at Twelve Life-Enhancing Powers of Relationship

First, in outline form, here are a few of the social sphere's most outstanding benefits to spirituality—and to life in general:

1. **Kindred spirits:** the supportive foundation of like-minded fellowship (shared values and goals; deep recognition; spiritual support; soul loyalty).

We seek spiritually supportive friends for good reason: We know, intuitively, that true recognition and true support from kindred spirits boosts well-being, inspires self-confidence, and expedites spiritual growth. Granted, each of us has the final word when it comes to the spiritually crucial achievements of self-acceptance and right self-identification; but good company can aid even those “strictly personal” accomplishments. For one thing, others can often see our true spiritual beauty much more readily than we do. And, it's generally easier for others to hold our flaws in a realistic and balanced perspective.

When other people have faith in us, we gain faith in ourselves. Their faith helps us to live up to our own higher standards, and pursue our highest dreams. How often we hear testimonies like this one about the power of soul support: “I owe a great debt of gratitude to my friend \_\_\_\_\_, who recognized my ability, and told me I could succeed.” Who among us doesn't feel a similar gratitude to some supportive friend?

2. **Great minds thinking alike:** the (seemingly) magical power of agreement.

Outer agreement dramatically strengthens inner thoughts and beliefs. Whenever two people agree on an idea or a course of action, great potential becomes present power!

For several months, Tom had been thinking that it was time to move on from his dead-end job. But nothing ever came of it. Then one day, a friend unexpectedly said to him, “You know, you deserve a better job. Why don't you start looking?” Suddenly, Tom felt a fresh surge of inspiration, a great resolve. After months of inaction, his indecision vanished. He started job-hunting the very next day, and soon landed a better job.

3. **Seeing ourselves through another's eyes:** the enlightening power of objective feedback.

The numerous benefits of social feedback add meaning to the truth, “Two heads are better than one.” Left to their own devices, people tend to get stuck in limiting patterns of thought and behavior. Close contact with human fellows helps to prevent encrustation, or free us from it.

Associates provide a wealth of objectivity, insights, and perspectives that no amount of solitary introspection can possibly produce. Parents, teachers, friends, even strangers impart invaluable lessons—both through direct remarks, and through their unspoken responses to us. We can even benefit from witnessing, up close, the misbehavior of others and its consequences. From that kind of example, we may learn many valuable lessons about what not to do.

4. **Many hands make light the work:** the power of social cooperation and coordinated activity.

Working closely together with others, with shared intention, puts huge wind in our sails. Together, we can do tremendous things practically without tiring. What wonders cooperation accomplishes: building an entire barn in a single day; rescuing hundreds of people after a natural disaster in a round-the-clock effort. Even in much less dramatic instances, true cooperation offers that same wonderful empowerment: Energy rises, productivity soars, and a happy spirit blesses both the work and the workers.

Cooperation not only eases and expedites our work; it immensely improves the results of it. No wonder, in almost every acceptance speech, every book, we find this acknowledgement: “I couldn’t have done it without \_\_\_\_\_.”

5. **The joyful kind of giving:** selfless service uplifts both giver and receiver.

Many hands make light the work. So does selfless love. Furthermore, selfless love makes the work into “light work”—work that is full of God’s light. That’s service as God intended it to be.

When we’re ego-identified, we tend to associate giving and serving with loss. Depletion. Exhaustion. Consequently, we may give reluctantly, and tire quickly. What happens to the joy of giving? Our negative assumptions eliminate it—and steal our energy as well. Rarely are we depleted by the act of giving itself. More likely, we’re drained by our spirit-depressing presumptions about giving.

Giving in a positive spirit is a joy. For example, you decide to do something wonderful for a friend—in a true spirit of love, with no strings attached. Diving into the project with great inspiration, fully absorbed in the work and beautiful intention behind it, you forget yourself, and feel great joy. That's true unselfish giving—and we all recognize how right that feels. And, it's the kind of service God can really get behind—literally!

Marvelous things happen when we release selfish concern and embrace loving intentions wholeheartedly. We get to love people freely and generously, as we are. And continuing on that path, something even more wonderful happens: The wholehearted effort to love unselfishly opens the floodgates of God's limitless love and energy. God is the Living Water, ready and waiting to flood the parched fields of earthly existence, and bring them back to life. When Divine blessings work freely through us, they uplift both giver and receiver.

6. **Everyday adventuring:** the transformative power of social stretching and social risk.

Obviously, many people dread the thought of taking risks—especially social risks. But regardless of fear—and perhaps in direct proportion to fear-embracing social risk produces real liberation, real growth. For example, after defying a fear of speaking in public, we feel such triumph, such liberation! We feel similarly invigorated by the joy and closeness that results from expressing tender feelings to an intimate. The social arena is the perfect place to create/enjoy the benefits of ego-defying, spirit-empowering, soul-liberating adventure. Any time we exceed our usual social limitations, and do something difficult or unfamiliar with others, we are likely to experience a breakthrough in consciousness.

7. **Nurturing raised to a Higher Power:** the therapeutic powers of healing energy and healing thought.

Humans can effectively heal each other on many levels—spiritual, emotional, and physical. Needless to say, loving touch has a palpably soothing, healing effect on the body and spirit. Bright perspectives and uplifting thoughts heal troubled minds and hearts. And where there are Godly intentions, Higher Power comes into play. Strongly loving intentions and faith make way for the participation of the Divine—the Great Healer. Needless to say, Divine participation can produce healing effects that are, at times, truly miraculous.

**8. Unchained from the past:** the liberating power of forgiveness.

Friends can do wonders to free each other from the shackles of guilt. When we've wronged someone or made a mistake, regret often lingers even after we've apologized and made amends. But we feel truly liberated from the past when we receive sincere forgiveness. Furthermore, when we forgive, we don't just free the other person from the past, we free ourselves from the past as well. The power of forgiveness liberates both the forgiver and the forgiven.

**9. Sympathetic vibrations:** the power of resonance.

Plucking one string of a guitar will cause neighboring strings to vibrate sympathetically. That's resonance. Human beings experience resonance too. Beautiful spirit qualities expressed by one person awaken and strengthen those same qualities in others.

*Example: After an argument, if one friend sincerely apologizes, the other may well feel inclined to apologize in return. That spirit of true humility is infectious.*

*Example: A store clerk treated with kindness and respect will probably treat the customer well in return..*

Through resonance, any chord we strike may reverberate farther than we know! Perhaps, when we brighten our own mind, we brighten the whole world a little bit..

**10. Group worship:** the God-invoking power of social prayer and supplication.

"Where two or more are gathered in My name, there I am also." The power of joining with others to invoke God's presence and blessings is universally recognized. Tremendous spiritual power springs from the shared Godly intentions of a group. Social worship, prayer circles, group meditations, and spiritual assemblies all make use of this principle.

**11. The uplifting circle of energy:** the enlivening power of energy-sharing/cycling.

For a couple of reasons, it's hard to generate as much energy alone as in relationship. First, when we uplift and benefit others by serving them, they are likely to reciprocate. In that sense, the energy we put out returns

to us, and completes the circle. As they say, “What goes around, comes around.”

Second, when energy moves in a circular fashion between two people, it multiplies. What goes around comes back stronger on every cycle. This effect occurs at events like a deeply meaningful conversation, ecstatic partner-dancing, musical jam sessions, etc. But in every instance, the more direct and intentional we are in sharing energy with others, the more effective the process. The resulting energy-circle spirals upward, uplifting everyone involved.

**12. A social “stairway to heaven”:** the power of soul communion as an bridge to God communion.

We’ve seen how conscious energy exchange between two people can quickly raise vibrancy, elevate the being, and enhance spirit-awareness. Here’s a further observation: If the upward spiral goes high enough, it creates shared mystical experiences. That is not as far-fetched as it may sound. Probably, for most of us, peak moments of loving communion and interpersonal energy exchange account for our closest encounters with the mystic dimension of life. Soulful communion, sexual rapture, and love bliss are all genuine mystical experiences of social origination.

Here’s how it happens: Just as the eyes are the windows of the soul, the soul is the window of God. When we surrender our attention into the space where we “overlap” with other beings, we find Divinity there. At such times, the river of soul communion has carried us to the ocean of God communion, and we are authentically experiencing the Unity and Divinity of life.

**A Deeper Look  
at More of the Social Sphere’s Contributions to Spiritual Life**

**Relationship inspires most of the ethically upleveling choices on Earth**

Every day, in relationships of all kinds, millions of people transcend their personal self-interest for the benefit of others. For example: “I’ll finish what I’m doing later; I can see you need my help right now.” And: “We’re spending less money on ourselves to save money for our children’s education.”

Philosophically, not everyone places great weight on self-transcendence as a conscious spiritual value, but everyone cares about the people in their lives.

Because we care about others, we transcend ourselves far more thoroughly than we would for any other reason—even for the sake of attaining our own spiritual goals. Time and time again, people spontaneously “go the extra mile” for cherished colleagues, special customers, good friends, and family members. Willingly. Happily! When we are truly caring, we serve not to impress them, or to indebted them to us, but simply as an outpouring of our caring, loyalty, and commitment. We do it for them.

### **Relationship shows us when and how we need to improve**

Relationship excels at showing us what to do and what not to do. Relationship shows us which attitudes support well-being, and which attitudes reduce it. This provides tremendous help in spiritual steering and personal refinement.

In every relational context, we see our own reflection in the social mirror. Any unconscious negative tendency—such as carelessness, selfishness, inattentiveness, etc.—is reflected back to us by the discomfort of our associates. Sometimes, if we don’t realize we’re being difficult, a companion may tell us so directly—by making a comment, or offering some specific objection, guidance, or correction. But even if no one speaks up, we can easily feel the effects of our actions on the well-being of our fellows, and on the tone of our relationships. Either way—by direct feedback or our own observations—relationship shows us what we need to transcend, correct, or refine in ourselves. And just as seeing our silhouette in a real mirror can motivate us to exercise, seeing our effects in the social mirror reminds us to keep exercising our spiritual values.

Clearly, the dynamic “real-time” sensitivity of the social context helps us see better, and be better. But sometimes, understandably, we find it difficult to face our reflection in the social mirror. And we may not always welcome social “pressure” to be good. What do we do then?

There are two ways to reduce the pressure of social involvement. The first option is blame. We can choose to blame others for the difficulties we experience/create. Or, when our associates react unfavorably to our negative tone or careless behavior, we may unfairly judge them as unreasonable or hypersensitive. The second option is avoidance. A common way people avoid the challenge of social sensitivity is to withdraw from social relations—or at least minimize them. That way, the effects of lower choices seem less severe, and we feel less need to improve.

But here’s the hitch: Minimizing involvement in relationship may be good news for the ego, but it’s hard on spiritual progress. Why? Because you can’t solve a problem you won’t face. And you can’t master an art you won’t practice.

To the extent that one can manage it, the most constructive path is to remain in the social context, and use social feedback to consciously, conscientiously refine our approach. Tremendous spiritual gains can be achieved that way.

### **Love tests in the social sphere**

Spiritual challenges come in many forms, but they all share one common objective: to test our ability to make a higher choice when tempted to make lower one. What's particularly useful about social challenges—as opposed to other kinds of spiritual tests—is that they're tests of love. They test all of love's essential components: forbearance; forgiveness; affinity; compassion; etc. Harmony in any kind of relationship depends on our ability to effectively develop and use those spiritual qualities.

Love tests are not just relevant to spiritual growth, but essential to it. To function as mature spiritual beings, we're obliged to love under all conditions. Social interactions test us thoroughly by providing lots of excuses not to love. We pass those tests every time we resist the temptation to respond negatively, and love anyway. Our track record in daily social experiences clearly reveals how much competence and consistency we have achieved at living our true higher nature.

*Feeling frustrated about her boyfriend's insensitivity, Kyla complained to Jessica, "He's making it so hard for me to love him!" Jessica wisely replied, "No he's not. He's making it POSSIBLE for you to love him. It's easy to respond lovingly when we're treated with love. But you can only take credit for loving TRULY when you love under challenging circumstances!"*

In each social incident, will we respond from a spiritual perspective? Will we handle the gains and pains, the elations and frustrations, of our social ups and downs with equanimity? Will we remain constructive in all our interpersonal interactions? Each annoyance, each headache, each heartache we encounter in relationship calls us to summon up a deeper love, a stronger commitment to remain loving regardless. No one can expect to be perfect, but every soul seeks perfection. Relationship admirably supports that quest.

In our spiritual maturity, we resolve to resist all temptations not to love. We absolutely refuse to forget the hearts of our friends when we get what we want. And, we absolutely refuse to withdraw or become resentful when we don't get what we want. To the extent that we're willing to love through both pleasure and pain, we are demonstrating our commitment to doing God's will. After all, God's will is love!



## **Relationship shows the Oneness of Life**

Unity is not just a lofty thought or a philosophical presumption—it's Reality. By demonstrating the fact of Unity, the social sphere supports the eventual awakening of true Unity-consciousness.

**Showing the evidence of Unity.** Perhaps in ordinary consciousness we cannot directly see the Reality of the Oneness of Life. And yet, every day, we find compelling evidence of Unity in our social experience, such as . . .

**Psychic *sensitivity*:** the instant, wordless communication of feelings between human beings. Shyness and social convention may sometimes keep us from acknowledging how psychically connected we are, yet all of us experience that connection daily. When others try to hide their feelings from us, we feel their feelings anyway. And the reverse is true: We can't hide our true feelings from them. Since Unity is our ultimate reality, psychic connection is the rule—no exceptions.

**Natural *caring*:** the natural tendency to care about the well-being of others, and the quality of our relationships with them. We are saddened by the suffering of others—even total strangers whose lives we only read about in the paper. We also care deeply about being understood and accepted by others—even if we think it shouldn't matter at all. It bothers us when we don't get along with people, or when people misunderstand or reject us (no matter how misguided we think they are). It is just as impossible for us to be indifferent to others, as it is for us to truly disconnect from them.

**Social *need*:** our fundamental need for social relationship. Human beings are social creatures. Human beings are social creatures. Whenever we have too little human contact, we experience loneliness—no matter how highly we value our “independence.” In truth, we can try to cope and adapt, but we can never outgrow our need for the companionship, love, and support of other human beings. Unity, not social isolation, is our natural condition.

## **Awakening the consciousness of Unity**

Hunger for Unity—with other people, and with God—drives all our social desires. Our efforts to draw closer to others—like our efforts to draw closer to God—bring us closer to satisfying that deeper hunger. Like a trail of breadcrumbs left by God, relationship leads to the realization of Unity. When appropriately used, the otherwise mundane experience of human relating

becomes a dynamic, enlightening process by which separative consciousness is progressively undone—and Unity-consciousness is achieved.

By opening up to heartfelt interaction with others in the world around us, we take our first, faltering steps on the path back to Unity. On that path, step by step, the feeling of separateness yields to the awareness of connection. That sets the stage for deeper, more mystical realizations of Unity.

Let's try describing that process in more detail: The journey into Oneness starts when we feel our connection to others. Feeling connection is followed by accepting connection, and embracing it. Progressively, the sense of you and me (connected, but still separate) evolves into a larger wholeness—we. Within we, excessive ego-identification subsides. Caring and commitment deepens. Love grows. As we surrender more deeply into to the unifying, ego-transcending power of love in the bright, warm bubble of soul communion, we discover God's presence. At last, in God's presence, the sense of you, me, and even we melts into the radiant Field of Being.

That's how, on the path called relationship, we progressively come to realize both the Omnipresence of God, and our non-separation from God.

### **Relationship is a spiritual phenomenon**

Now that we've told you about so many ways relationship helps spiritual life, we're going to let you in on a big secret: Rightly used, relationship is a legitimate and effective spiritual practice. And that just might be one of the world's best-kept secrets.

Few people fully appreciate the spiritual benefits of social engagement. Understandably so. Relationships so often fall short of their spiritual potential. To succeed humanly or spiritually in the social sphere depends on right understanding and proper use. You wouldn't give your car keys to someone who is not a competent driver. And yet, we may establish friendships, become employees—even start families—with little understanding of what we're getting into.

It's a sensitive ecosystem, the social sphere. That's because, fundamentally, human beings are spiritual in nature—and so are their relationships. When we enter into relationship, we're entering into a spiritual context. The spirit is naturally sensitive to factors of spiritual, emotional, and moral impact—like kindness, for example, and trust. Such factors determine the spirit of involvement, not its outer form. They may be subtle, but are nonetheless potent.

It is said, “It’s not what you say; it’s how you say it.” We recognize the truth of that expression, since we have experienced its truth many times. Even so, we may still focus more on what we said than how we said it; more on what we did than the spirit with which we did it. No wonder people often feel bewildered and out of control in the social arena! We’re investing in the what, while the how determines our results.

***Example:** In a divorce hearing sits another mystified husband. And like many before him, the poor fellow complains, “Look at what I did for her! After everything I did, THIS is the appreciation I get?” An honest response to his bewilderment would be this: “You poor fellow, you’re right: what you did was fine, perhaps even heroic. But while you focused on WHAT you did, your mate focused on the spirit in which you did it. Possibly, you acted more out of a spirit of obligation than a spirit of appreciation. Surely, you’re standing in this court today because of your HOW, not your WHAT.”*

The fact that children of God are spiritual beings—and as such, good and sensitive—is what makes the social sphere emotionally/spiritually challenging. But it also makes relationship a spiritual opportunity of ultimate value! By accepting the spiritual nature of relationship, and adapting to human needs spiritually, we can fulfill our relationships and further our spiritual growth—all at the same time, and by the same means. Happily, we have the opportunity to practice a truly spiritual way of relating in virtually every interaction we have, in every relationship.

***Example:** Spiritual insensitivity is the cause of many—perhaps most—social blunders. Consider, for example, a heavy-handed criticism of an employee’s mistake. The harsh tone most likely interferes with the effectiveness of the communication, and the quality of the relationship. If the supervisor stayed in touch with the feeling level in the interaction, he might notice that the harsh tone isn’t working, and adjust accordingly.*

Note that the adjustment needed is not a change in the message; it’s a spiritual adjustment. He can change the spirit of his communication through adjustments in attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and intentions. By so doing, he can preserve the quality of the relationship.

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## **The uplifting potential of relationship depends on how you use it**

How do we consistently bring a good spirit to our social interactions? By keeping our purposes high. Like any spiritual opportunity, relationship can be used for the achievement of spiritual purposes, or abused in pursuit of egotistical purposes. Spirit purposes are generous; ego purposes, selfish. To realize the positive potential of the social sphere, we need to:

1. Release the ego-approved strategies that undermine relationship, and
2. Embrace the spirit-guided approach that makes relationship beneficial, supportive, constructive, and uplifting.

**Spirit loves interpersonal harmony.** If Spirit is allowed to guide our social relations, it will maximize the good by means of human sensitivity, spiritual discernment, and Divine obedience. To the extent that we consistently approach our human interactions from the Spirit's perspective, we can make marvelous use of the uplifting powers of relationship.

**Ego loves social failure.** Unlike the Spirit, ego tends to be unconstructive in relationship, perhaps even perverse. Just when a relationship could have provided a spiritual boost, ego sets it back. If ego is allowed to guide our social interactions, it will bring them to grief, because failure helps justify and perpetuate egotism.

More than anything else, ego wants others to leave us alone. Ego feels threatened by the moral and spiritual requirements for relationship success. Social life calls for a higher degree of love and surrender than does a solitary existence. With its anti-social habits of offense and defense, ego rebels against the actual requirements of love, and makes relationship hell. Eventually, by so doing, it gets the monkey off its back—and makes relationship look bad in the bargain.

Once ego-directed relating robs the social sphere of its upside potential, solitude seems preferable to togetherness. No wonder many people conclude, "It's much better to live or work by myself, because relationship is a real drag. Or, "God is the only true friend. Relating to people never works."

But remember, the dangers of relating, though real enough, exist primarily because EGO creates them. Ego causes social problems, and then warns us about them. It even gives us very bad advice about how to solve them—advice that only makes matters worse. How can we possibly be problem-free following

the advice of ego? How can we ever be problem-free unless we are free of ego? It's impossible. We need a different way to go.

The good news is, we have a better choice. We don't have to simply surrender to ego's rule, watch our relationships be ruined, and end up alone. Instead of giving up on relationship, we can give up on egotism.

*Despite the disappointments we may have suffered—and all of us have had our share—we must beware of throwing out the baby with the bath water. We should NOT throw out the baby of beautiful, spirit-guided relationship with the bath water of ugly, ego-ruined interactions.*

### **God will help**

You can count on this: God is ever ready to help us relate rightly, because God works more through human relationships than by any other means. To play our part socially, our most important contribution is the willingness to be Divinely guided—as opposed to ego-misguided. That's a formula for spiritual success in all the spheres of life, isn't it?

Personal spiritual growth is only one of the fruits of spiritual participation in social living. The Divine plan for planetary healing and upliftment depends on human collaboration. The Living Water of Divine love, grace, and healing is always pressing against the dam of human will, waiting to pour forth to bless the world. In our own case, will we hold it back, or will we let it flow? If we let it flow, not only we, but everyone we contact in the social sphere of life will be blessed.

## **What the Social Sphere Contributes to the Practical Sphere**

*Which is better: the thrill of achievement, or the joy of having someone to share it with? When social life supports practical life, we can have more of BOTH. Conversely, when social life is weak, we not only lack friends to share our triumphs, we probably have less success to celebrate.*

*Commonly, people tend to see their social life and their practical life as separate and unrelated, perhaps even in conflict. This article shows how much social life AIDS practical life in many ways.*

The social sphere contributes immeasurably to practical life. Social motivations are what really get us going, and keep us going. We truly want to make a positive difference—either to special loved ones or to humanity at large. That desire to contribute inspires us to dream higher, and work harder. And of course, support from others makes it much more possible to reach any goal we've set. In fact, the better our social relationships, the more we can accomplish. So let's take a good look at the many ways our social relations can benefit practical life.

### **Helping people (the urge to serve)**

Service is the heart of practical life. Fortunately, most of our practical work benefits others. Helping others gives us a great purpose and a deep sense of satisfaction.

Helping others may not rank high on our list of daily priorities, but it certainly should. Everywhere we turn, people need help. Children do not thrive, physically or emotionally, without the devoted service of parents and other adults. Businesses cannot succeed without the loyalty and dedication of their workers. Every community needs the active participation of its members, and mutually beneficial dealings with other communities, in order to endure and prosper.

But service is more than just an ethical duty; it's a cosmic "calling"—an impulse that springs from the very depths of our spiritual nature. In our hearts and souls, we identify with all of humanity. We recognize all persons as our brothers and sisters in God. We care about their welfare and happiness. Therefore, we don't need training or social pressure to serve; the impulse to serve is our native response to the Unity of Life. No wonder service feels so Divinely right!

## **People to help us (we all need help)**

What goes around comes around. In the Unity of Life, serving and being served flow into one another in an endless circle. This circle of mutual service is an essential element in the Divine plan for healing and upliftment. May the circle be unbroken! Everyone would thrive if we consistently lived in the spirit of this beautiful blessing:

*“May you always do for others, and let others do for you...”*

Clearly, for the circle to keep flowing, we must give and also receive service freely. Rejecting help can be just as much a problem as refusing to help. We stop the flow whenever we're reluctant to ask for help, or to accept it.

Receiving help can be more challenging than giving it. Most people take pride in being self-sufficient. We may feel reluctant to burden others; we may not want to become indebted to anyone. But the fact remains:

*“No man is an island.”*

Even the world's most committed loners recognize the practical impossibility of a completely independent lifestyle. Staunch survivalists living in remote areas rely on trade, and periodic deliveries of crucial supplies to sustain their solitude. In any lifestyle, people who habitually refuse help just make their practical life unnecessarily harder.

Let's be honest: There's practically no such thing as a purely personal accomplishment. At every award ceremony, almost every acceptance speech includes this grateful acknowledgement: “I couldn't have done it without \_\_\_\_\_.” It's true. We all get by with a little help from our friends.

Whatever we do, we at least started by learning our craft from someone—probably several people. And once we've learned it, we all do our life's work within a larger circle, including assistants, colleagues, advisors, suppliers, well-wishers, and patrons. In this sense, every so-called individual accomplishment represents the culmination of group efforts.

Who said that depending on others necessarily reflects weakness—or inadequacy, or irresponsibility? How tragically misleading! It's more like a way to leverage our personal strengths into something far greater. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. So, the odds favor those who allow themselves to be helped!

## Cooperation for practical accomplishment

Many of the practical benefits of social relationship result from cooperation. People working together for a shared purpose can indeed accomplish wonders.

1. **Large projects require cooperative effort.** As part of our desire to help, we often dream bigger dreams than we can fulfill by ourselves. One person has only so much time and energy; If we work alone, our individual strength, energy, ingenuity, and faith won't create the results we desire. Therefore, our fondest projects may require, for their accomplishment, the combined skills and energy of a number of people.

It is said, "United we stand, divided we fall." Here we could say, "United we accomplish great things, divided we're more likely to fall short."

2. **Cooperation multiplies energy.** The benefits of cooperation start even before anyone lifts a hand: Inspiration multiplies the moment other people resonate our values and share our vision. And when cooperative work begins, the thrill of joined intention and coordinated effort puts huge wind in our sails.

Work teams often accomplish tremendous things practically without tiring. We've all heard about groups building an entire barn in a single day, or rescuing hundreds of people after a natural disaster in a round-the-clock effort. Even in a simple, everyday act like cleaning the kitchen, true cooperation offers the same wonderful empowerment: Energy rises, productivity soars, and a happy spirit blesses both the work and the workers. In teamwork, one plus one equals four. That's what we call "spiritual math"!

3. **Two heads are better than one.** Teamwork not only eases and expedites human effort; it significantly improves the outcome at every stage of the process. In the planning stage, pooling ideas almost invariably produces the best possible strategy. When unexpected challenges obstruct the work process, we solve them best with the input of others. The principle "two heads are better than one" applies in all kinds of projects, from putting a man on the moon to throwing a party. In most cases, by working and thinking together, we can not only achieve our goals, but surpass them!

## Social rejuvenation/nurturing

The daily grind of ordinary practical life consumes lots of energy. To maintain full effectiveness day after day, we need our batteries recharged periodically. For



body/spirit refreshment, social exchange excels. Rarely does any solitary activity—even sleep—refresh us as quickly and thoroughly.

Social rejuvenation obviously includes direct energy infusions from others; for instance, through getting sympathy, or a massage. We also get a powerful boost from social interactions in which energy flows both ways, such as lively conversation, dancing, and social recreation. We gain by giving to others as much as by receiving.

A positive social life helps us keep up with the never-ending demands of practical life. So next time you feel too busy or tired to go out with your buddies or to call a friend, think again. A brief social intermission can more than pay for itself in higher energy, greater clarity, and more stamina for the work ahead.

### **Poor social ability creates huge practical problems**

We more fully appreciate the practical value of healthy relating when we see how poorly life works without it. Low social functioning (or no social functioning) creates numerous practical inefficiencies.

*Example: In aboriginal communities, men hunt together and share their prey. Why are they so cooperative? If each of them hunted alone, they would certainly not fare as well. Their culture recognizes that the welfare of their families and very survival of the tribe as a whole depends, in the most practical ways, on social affinity.*

**At work.** The social-practical connection is so strong that employers dread problem employees—meaning, workers who don't get along socially. When work relationships become problematical, morale goes down the drain, and productivity falls like a stone. At their worst, interpersonal problems may force impromptu changes in procedures; for example, a lone worker may have to attempt a task designed to be done in pairs. Even a mild case of personal “incompatibility” reduces the frequency and clarity of communication, and dramatically increases mistakes.

On the heels of social conflict, workplace inefficiencies continue to mount up until good relations are restored. And healing itself comes at a high price. Often, restoring harmony will require lots of talking, soul searching, getting over it, and making amends. If time and willingness do not allow for a solution, peace may not return until someone quits—or gets fired.

**At home.** All around the world, interpersonal conflicts make home life far more difficult than it would otherwise be. Think of the emotional and practical costs

of broken friendships, family feuds, messy lawsuits, and bitter inheritance battles. All of that wrecks havoc on practical affairs.

The huge practical implications of divorce or separation make a perfect case in point: Two people who once shared rent, food, and chores must now maintain two homes, duplicate household duties, and synchronize childcare responsibilities. How terribly impractical to not get along!

**In the world at large.** The impracticality of global division and discord is monumental—and tragically wasteful. Nations impoverish themselves, and jeopardize the welfare of millions, when governments or citizens indulge in self-centered, conflictual mentality.

- On an international scale, tremendous resources have disappeared into the bottomless pit of military preparations.
- On a national scale, conflict has caused the immense suffering of protracted and costly labor strikes, violent race riots, etc.

### **Use the social, don't abuse it**

We've established the fact that good social skills yield significant benefits in practical life. Does that mean that love yields the most mutual benefit? After all, love is the greatest social "skill" of all.

Potentially, it's true-love could literally transform our everyday world. Note, however, that only genuine love has transformative power. We're not genuinely loving when we "love" for the expected rewards of doing so. We can easily tell the difference when we're on the receiving end! How does it feel to be pursued because you have a nice car, or lots of money, or valuable skills to impart? Not good!

Though the practical benefits of getting along well with others give us great incentive to improve our social functioning, we'll never truly succeed with people if our interest in them is primarily practical. Whenever we exercise any of our social skills in pursuit of personal gain, our strategy backfires. We need a higher-minded approach.

Fortunately, we all have plenty of good and valid motivations for socializing, and even for consciously applying the power of social life to practical life. Built into our Divine "genetics," we all have a deep need for each other, and a sincere desire to relate well to others for their sake. So, let's try to pursue healthy social lives with no strings attached, as an expression of our true spiritual nature and

our heartfelt desire. If we reap some practical side-effects as a bonus, great! If not, we're already better off.

## How the Social Sphere Contributes to the Mystic Sphere

*Mystical life seems to concern itself with one very special relationship: the one between the individual and God. Human relationships are sometimes considered distractions from that cosmic love affair. But in fact, the social sphere and the mystic sphere are SUPREMELY compatible. By Divine design, human relationships SUPPORT mystic fulfillment in several important ways.*

1. **Spark up: Social interactions—especially deep ones—*spark us up (to higher vibration)*.** Social interactions can lift our spirits to the level where God can communicate directly to us.
2. **Tune up: Ethical relating *tunes us up (to God’s wavelength)*.** Social opportunities and challenges help us become more compatible with God’s will. They teach us where we need to refine our attitudes and intentions so that God can work with us and through us better.
3. **Live up: Social experiences give us a way to *live up (to our part in cooperation with God)*.** The enlightened life at the end of the spiritual rainbow is a life of doing God’s will in direct cooperation with God. When we love and care for others, we are *already* in alignment with God’s will. Thus, loving service to others is wonderful preparation for the Life Divine.

**Note:** This paper describes how human relationships can be used to support mystical experience. For some of these purposes, relatively high-functioning relationships are required—relationships which, in today’s socially dysfunctional world, may not be easy to come by. We hope, dear reader, that you will not be discouraged by that fact. However, we simply could not do justice to the actual mystic potential of social experience *without* referring to social relations that are truly positive, and highly functional.

We know from our personal experience that positive, functional social situations *do* exist. And we are certain that every person who is truly ready and willing to relate deeply will find them. For example, we at the LLF make this pledge to any person who truly seeks deep relationships: We will give you as much of our understanding, experience, and loving attention as your interest and openness allow.

### **Social experiences *spark us up* (to higher vibration)**

*You got to lively up yourself* — Bob Marley

How do you “lively up yourself”? Partly, with a little help from your friends! Social interaction has tremendous power to quicken and uplift. Even a simple conversation can speed our pulse and elevate our consciousness. A letter or phone call can make our day. And the uplifting potential goes *way* up from there!

The uplifting power of deep human exchanges—as in heartfelt emotional sharing or lovemaking—is practically unlimited. Under the right circumstances, such exchanges even yield genuine mystic revelations. It should come as no surprise, then, that in most people’s lives, in most people’s diaries, in most people’s memories, many of the highest moments and peak experiences are *social*.

### **Peak love experiences lift us into the mystic**

Consider, for example, peak experiences of love. Foremost among the higher fruits of loving is the realization of spiritual Unity. People deeply in love often feel, “You and me, we are not separate; we are one and the same.” Such

moments of true Unity-consciousness represent *high* mystical realizations of Truth.

Love-rapture also has an unmistakably mystic flavor. In deep communion with a loved one—either in thought or in person—ordinary consciousness yields to a sublime blend of loving attention, subtle sensitivity, spaciousness, and ecstasy.

The mystic dimension clearly overlaps the social realm in experiences of psychic connection—for example, between a mother and her child, or between any two people who care deeply about each other. Subtle awareness of the thoughts, feelings, and state of a loved one often exceed what could be explained by normal means of communication. Such experiences transcend, and *heal*, our ordinary convictions of separation. Once again, interpersonal love lifts us well beyond our mundane level of consciousness into mystic experiences of Unity.

Moments of soul communion feel divinely wonderful because they *are* Divine. Perhaps the greatest of all socially-generated mystic experiences is the encounter with God's presence in the "bubble" of soul communion<sup>i</sup>. When we connect deeply with another person, we feel energy within, and then, progressively, we feel energy and brightness "in the air." If we persist, the *space* around us feels electrically charged. What's *that*? That, dear friends, is *God*. Sometimes during experiences of soul communion, we may see everything around us bathed in radiance, and even disappear into the Light. Such experiences prove, beyond question, the great value of the social sphere to the mystical sphere. Effortlessly, in love rapture, we attain what all mystics crave, and work so hard to experience: the experience of God's Presence, gently outshining everything else without and within.

What grace, that God has provided such a direct and accessible route to *Divine* Love, through *human* love! With its power to raise us into experiences of Divine Union, intense social exchange can equal meditation, prayers, or any other spiritual "technique." Social relations can certainly provide rocket fuel for launching us into much higher states of consciousness.

### **The power of collective worship**

*Where two or more come together in My name, there I am with them.*

—Christianity

The social-mystic connection functions in all the varieties of group worship, group prayer, and group meditation. Worship gatherings can dramatically uplift

the participants, moving them into conscious awareness of Divine Presence. Social forms of spiritual practice (such as Unification) can do the same.

*For a description of Unification, go to:*

*<http://www.soulprogress.com/html/Unification/UnificationIntro.shtml>*

So can group ecstatic dancing, group singing, public prayer, and confession. Surely the appearance of God, as promised, is what gives collective worship its exceptional synergy. No wonder every religion includes a form of group worship in its tradition!

We've already noted how deep soul communion becomes Divine Communion. This frequently occurs where there is strong love-desire. This social-mystical connection also explains why people often have such precious—almost *religious*—feelings about their peak experiences of lovemaking. And why people feel such devotion towards their partners in those experiences. It is no coincidence, then, that in spiritual traditions throughout the world, mystical practices in pairs, such as Tantra Yoga and sacred sexuality, have used gender polarity to enhance the power of soul communion.

### **Inspiration: Blessings of mystics**

No consideration of the social-mystical connection would be complete without acknowledging the uplifting influence of God-connected men and women. In the company of mystics, social experience *is* mystical experience. Therefore, throughout history, the opportunity to bask in the light of a “man or woman of God” has always been highly prized, and eagerly sought.

Any positive individual has an uplifting influence and healing effect on others. But the *degree* of that influence varies tremendously. *Spirit-tuned* individuals transmit particularly powerful energy, love, and light. Their mere presence has miraculous ability to inspire, heal, and enhance well-being. What we feel from authentic mystics is not just human charisma, but direct Divine Blessings.

God is omnipresent, but most people do not feel God's Presence everywhere equally. In the company of mystics we discover that God's Presence can be felt particularly strongly and reliably *through* people—especially *God-attuned* people. When it comes to *transmitting* Love's Light, the human being is like a lens. The lens may be clear, as in the case of an individual whose will is fully surrendered to God. Or, like sunglasses, the lens may be darkened to varying degrees by selfish motivations, negative thinking, and ego-identification. In some people, the lens may even be completely opaque—so that God's Love Light doesn't shine

through at all. But when the Light passes through the clear lens of a God-connected individual, powerful blessings flow.

Since a single meeting with a mystic can have such profoundly beneficial effects, just imagine what a long-term involvement could accomplish! Indeed, a relationship to a spiritual mentor or enlightened teacher has traditionally been recognized as one of the most effective paths to mystical realization. The evidence is overwhelming: virtually all persons of significant mystical realization achieved their spiritual growth with the help of a human guide.

### **Spiritual launching pad: A solid foundation of emotional fulfillment**

The essence of all spiritual adventure is the transcendence of egotism and ego itself—not a task for the faint of heart! Letting go of ego requires strong faith, self-confidence, and personal security. Therefore, paradoxically, until and unless our ego structures are strong enough, we cannot—or will not—let go.

Where do we get an ego structure strong enough to transcend ego? Personal strength can come from a variety of sources, but emotional fulfillment ranks high on the list. Positive social connections support us in developing the strength and self-confidence we need to face spiritual challenges boldly, with faith. Social scientists observe that infants raised with great love and devotion enjoy a high level of security as children, and grow into healthy confidence and self-sufficiency. But then too, *all* years are “formative years.” Healthy relationships at any age create a foundation of emotional security that can support *all* of our adventures in spiritual growth.

Relationships of all kinds have the potential to nourish us. We are empowered by the nurturing affection of supportive parents and other family members; the dependable love of a devoted spouse; the commitment and loyalty of true friends; the admiration and respect of workmates. Any relationship will be spiritually supportive if it:

1. Boosts true confidence by recognizing and nurturing the higher self<sup>fi</sup> of the individuals.
2. Provides encouragement for bold and righteous living, and does not chronically collude with weakness, timidity, or unrighteousness.
3. Supports the development of a broad social base by tolerating, or even *encouraging*, individuals to love broadly, sufficiently, even universally.
4. Happily grants the individuals time and space for spiritual practice.



Granted, such ideal conditions may be hard to find. These days, spiritually supportive relationships are rare. However, God did not give us social needs and desires without the means to fulfill them. The way to have spiritually fulfilling relationships is simple enough, but rarely *practiced*. And that accounts for the scarcity of both emotional *and* spiritual fulfillment on earth.

To find people who will support you, start by *being* the kind of person you seek. It is rightly said, “Birds of a feather flock together.” If you study the four points above and strive to offer that kind of support to others in your life, you will eventually attract the same support to yourself. On the other hand, if you simply watch and wait without preparing yourself in this way, the people you seek will not be attracted to you. Instead, you may find yourself surrounded by others who also demand but hesitate to give real emotional nurturance.

### **Ethical relating *tunes us up* (to God’s wavelength)**

*“You never can enter the kingdom of God with hard feelings against any one.  
For God is love; and if you love God, you will love one another.”*

—Shakerism

In spite of teachings like the one quoted above, many traditional mystics have placed little emphasis on social competence. They have justified their anti-social priorities with a seek-ye-first-the-kingdom-of-heaven philosophy. Is that wise?

It’s unwise to disregard this fact: Social dysfunction/disharmony can easily *prevent* mystic experience. The social context is spiritually and emotionally *challenging*. Differences between people in terms of perceived needs, desires, and beliefs spawn seemingly endless conflicts and anxieties. Those conflicts are spiritually chilling.

There’s no doubt that spiritual practices can improve the way people relate to others and to the world. Greater space and higher consciousness can certainly help us hold high intentions and keep good resolves. However, no spiritual practice can, by itself, correct unethical social patterns of thought and behavior. For that, we need to include social harmony in our spiritual aspirations, and add ethical relating to our spiritual practice.

Traditionally, serious spiritual seekers tend to choose a path of lesser resistance: minimize social interactions in order to avoid interpersonal disharmony that will bring them down. But there’s another choice! If we use social challenges rightly, each one becomes an upward step on a stairway to *liberation*. Each of our self-

transcending efforts to serve and love others to the best of our ability lifts us up. So the same social *aggravation* that seems to imperil spiritual ascent can, if properly used, help spiritual ascent tremendously.

In addition, if we don't ignore our social dissatisfactions, they provide compelling motivation to improve our social intentions and orientations. Cultivating social sensitivity can further our spiritual goals as well as our social life. Our sincere intention to understand and harmonize with others puts us on God's wavelength.

### **The mystic advantage of “making peace with your brothers first”**

Guilt, blame, and justification sap mental energy and sabotage spiritual progress. Therefore, all religions wisely recommend ethical living and relationship harmony as the basis for spiritual life.

When we're relating poorly, we may be taking two steps forward in the meditation chamber, and then *dozens* of steps backward in our everyday interactions. Problematic interactions and their lingering effects can consume almost all the attention that could otherwise be devoted to positive spiritual practices. And if social disharmony excessively disturbs mental peace, we may even find meditation practically impossible. Thus:

*If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

—Christianity

We can greatly improve the efficacy of our formal spiritual practices by cleaning up our social interactions. When we start our devotions with a clean conscience, the uplifting power of spiritual practice can very effectively raise us into levels of consciousness that are truly sublime. Spiritual practices can then be used for the purpose of elevating us from high places to even higher places—rather than for lifting us out of a hole, or getting us out of a jam.

### **Loving man and God: *Can we get close to God while mistreating people?***

As mystics, we approach heaven's gates hoping for Divine reunion. But how ready are we for that blessed meeting? We can learn a lot about our readiness by looking at our human relationships.

*Whatsoever you do unto the least of these, you do unto Me.*

—Christianity

*...those immersed in the love of God feel love for all things.*

—Sikhism

*If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

—Christianity

*... those dearest to God are those who treat His children kindly.*

—Islam

*You may recognize my disciples by the love they have for one another.*

—Christianity

This brings us to another important reason to handle human relationships well: We need to cultivate life attitudes that would be conducive to a positive, effective, functional relationship with God. Certainly, if we're forming bad habits of being closed, conflictual, and skeptical with our fellows, we will have difficulty suddenly shifting gears when we try to get along with God. For example:

- A person who won't take advice even when it's obviously right will have a hard time surrendering to Divine promptings.
- A person who is overly controlling in relationships will tend to avoid or reject the higher energies that accompany mystic experiences.
- A person who is blaming and resentful will have great difficulty maintaining positive faith in God when things don't go well.
- A mind and a heart thickened by shame and hardened by hate is not open to anyone—not even God.

Clearly, attitudes are hard to compartmentalize. True openness on virtually any level requires releasing all manner of grievances. Consequently, we can't possibly be unconscious or uncaring towards *most* of life, and then be functional in *any* love relationship—including the relationship with God.

### **Ethical relating for spiritual ascent**

Here is a deeper reason why positive ethical relating supports mystic achievement: spiritual evolution results from the *expansion* of consciousness. Enlightenment is the ultimately expanded state! Consequently, it behooves spiritual aspirants to avoid doing anything that *compresses* consciousness.

Leading the list of daily experiences that work against the expansion of consciousness are interactions that make us feel guilty, blaming, or defensive. Thinking ill of others, treating them poorly, and then failing to properly correct our transgressions—such behaviors deflate the spirit. They erode the healthy self-image that allows a person to jump into the arms of God.

Conversely, as we polish up our ethics, the social concerns that contract our being begin to relax. We no longer fear retaliation or punishment. We can relax our defenses and let down our walls. For example, when a man stops deceiving and becomes straightforward in his communications, he feels happier and more presentable. The same can be said for people who pay back what they owe. After they settle their accounts, they feel lighter and freer.

As we make ethical relating our habit and daily practice, we gradually undo the physical and emotional knots—the tight stomach, the tied tongue, the furrowed brow, etc.—that come from longstanding fear and shame. We become more sensitive, more responsive, more flexible, more optimistic. Aren't these wonderful dividends, simply for doing right by others?

### **Good social functionality supports the expansion of consciousness**

Right relating is much more than simply a way to avoid the knots resulting from wrong relating! Healthy social outreach is naturally consciousness-*expanding*. We can feel the expansion even in ordinary social situations. Wholesome social engagement . . .

- **Calls us to pay attention.** Simply being around other people draws us *out* of the pattern of chronic self-focus. Further, a healthy social life creates affinities and involvements that *keep* our attention and energies outward-moving.
- **Corrects our limiting presumptions.** Generally, social isolation reinforces the egoic tendency to presume that we are different than, better or worse than—and potentially in conflict with—practically everyone else. Positive social experiences disprove that depressing and limiting view. For example, every time a friend says, “I’ve had the same problem,” or “I feel the same way,” it contradicts our separative beliefs about ourselves and others. And when social situations inspire us to offer *our* energy and support to *others*, we overcome our self-limiting presumptions and habits.
- **Calls up the best within us.** The more deeply we’re involved with others, the more our caring brings out our most beautiful human/spiritual qualities: devotion, commitment, generosity, compassion, reliability. etc. As they gain

power, these spiritual qualities expand our understanding of who we truly are.

Needless to say, *love* is the most expansive and Godly/Godlike of all human activities. If we love generously and consistently, we experience for ourselves how expansive love truly is! Eventually, the outpouring of our love undoes even the tendency to contract. Then, if we make a mistake, no worries—we fix it. If others accuse us, insult us, ignore us, or revere us, it's not the end of the world. No matter what happens or how we're treated, our awareness will not collapse. Now *that's* expanded consciousness!

Once again, we see what a marvelously effective “spiritual practice” healthy social interaction can be. So remember:

*Consciousness expands much more rapidly when  
healthy social engagement becomes a part of daily practice.*

And conversely:

*When we forfeit social involvements, we lose  
one of the best and most natural ways to expand.*

### **Social experiences give us a way to *live up* (to our part in cooperation with God)**

#### **The Life Divine *is* a social life**

The Life Divine, a life of loving service in close cooperation with God, is the ultimate goal of *all* mystic ascent. Why?—because God is Love! So, a God-directed life is a life committed to loving. And clearly, the social sphere is where such a life takes place.

Not surprisingly, most Divine directives are *social* directives; that is, they are inspirations to directly heal, serve, or uplift people. Even when God's guidance arrives as insights, not instructions, those insights often have social import, too. For example: “I am all that lives. I am in each person you see.” When we apply Divine insights in life, they tend to have a healing, helpful, or uplifting effect on *everyone* we contact. They inevitably improve our social skills across the board.

*To read more on this topic, see “How the Still Small Voice Works”  
see link in article list at <http://www.soulprogress.com>*

### **Social life teaches us to *listen up***

Divine cooperation is the most spiritually uplifting occupation any human being can have. In it, our social and mystic urges are perfectly united, and happily fulfilled. Fortunately, anyone can grow to hear, in daily life, the inner voice of Divine guidance. And anyone can obey it. There again, social life expedites the process.

For all who aspire to the Life Divine, but who cannot yet consistently hear and obey God's inner guidance, the social sphere provides excellent motivation to rely on Divine direction. In social life, we frequently face human needs that are heartrending to feel and seemingly impossible to solve. When mortal understanding and ingenuity fall short, we think, ponder, and pray. We reach and beseech for the right response, the right approach. We tune for the right attitude. Excellent!

When we begin this tuning process, we're not yet involved in Divine obedience; or if we are, it is only in the most general sense: trying to act as we think God would have us do. At this stage, we can only employ our own powers of observation, and make our own best efforts to love and care for others. However, that is a necessary first step. As we sincerely strive to relate with compassion, forgiveness, and love, we gradually open our hearts and tune our minds for receiving God's loving inspirations. Eventually, the ability to *hear* God's voice develops.

That ability allows a further increment in our spiritual development: choosing to do God's bidding *specifically*. As free will creatures, we forever have the last word on whether or not we will act on the Divine promptings we receive. Here again, our previous efforts in the social sphere prepare us well for Divine obedience. Having happily bent our will to serving others, we bend much more easily and reliably in compliance with the will of God.

*For more reading on this interesting and important subject, see  
"Cooperating With God: How to Deliver God's Gifts to People"  
and "The Evolution of Love"*

*see links in article list at <http://www.soulprogress.com>*

### **Fulfilling the Divine design**

We said at the beginning of this article that human relationship serves spiritual life *by Divine design*. Because of our Divine genetics, the child takes after the Parent. God's desire for intimacy with humanity is the root of human social desires. God's overflowing care and devotion toward humanity reverberates in

our own personally loving impulses. God’s loving relationship to all of life is the blueprint for our own.

In our spiritual maturity, we will grow fully into the Life Divine. Body, mind and spirit will function together as a single, continuous gesture of obedience to God’s will and our own. That gesture is *love*. Without a doubt, the social sphere provides the ideal environment for that momentous development to occur.

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<sup>i</sup> **Relationship bubble:** A subtle but tangible energy sphere that arises between two people who are directly and intentionally connected in mutual awareness and higher consciousness.

<sup>ii</sup> **True (Higher) Self:** The self we normally identify with is a fabrication of our ego (intended to replace what God made with a “new, improved” identity that better matches the *ego’s* ideals of perfection). By design, the mask totally conceals the real face behind it. But, although we may get caught up in the dramas of self-centered existence and even become totally identified with them, we can never reduce ourselves to mere ego. The most convincing proof of that is found in our true spiritual aspirations. If we were the egoic beings we may presume ourselves to be, we would never be motivated to recognize, respond to, and aspire to the realization of Truth, high ideals, and God.

When we talk about the True or Higher Self, we are referring to these higher levels of being:

- **Unique God-given personality.** Higher and truer than the fabricated “self” is the unique, irreplaceable personality God made. People who have learned to consistently recognize and express their unique soul characteristics are considered to be “self-actualized.”
- **Kinship with all God’s children.** On yet a higher level, we find the universal selfhood that we share with all God’s children. At the LLF we call this the “Self-same Self,” to underscore that on this level, “my” True Self is not different from “your” True Self (and to explain why, in our hearts, we all agree on what is most important and true). People who identify with this level of being value what all human beings share in common more than their own—or any one else’s—unique attributes.

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- **Divine spiritual essence.** At the highest level of our being lies the Spirit aspect of the human entity -- the Divine essence of Life. That Spirit exceeds our individual personality and even the universal aspects of our humanity, and overlaps with God. It is an indivisible spark of infinite life and infinite consciousness. People who are conscious at this level of being identify—in a good way—with Godhead. This is the state in which the enlightened one ecstatically pronounces, “I am He!” and also, “World is God.” Seeing the world is God is an experience that is actually beyond even the all-embracing qualities of self-same-Selfhood. It is perceiving the Absolute within the relative, and perceiving the relative *as* the Unmanifest.

As we grow spiritually by releasing more and more ego, we progressively identify with more and more of our True Self nature.