

**THE ART OF LIVING  
IN RELATIONSHIP**  
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**Part One: Learning to Relate**

*Chapter Two: Possessive Relationship and  
Participatory Relationship*

Although the art of living in relationship is a process of continual growth, we could for the sake of discussion divide it into two major stages: possessive relationship and participatory relationship.

A possessive relationship creates dependence. The possessive person acts as if he can treat other people as though he were lord and master of everything around him, including other people, their lives, feelings and thoughts. When someone is in this state of consciousness and doesn't get what he wants, he reacts--he either becomes depressed or gets angry. The inevitable consequences of possessive relationships are pain and destruction.

Aggression in possessive relationships comes from the determination to dominate others. If one does not think of others as possessions, one is unable to vent one's passions on them. Although possessive relationships do not always manifest themselves in acts of physical violence, they always do violence to other people, to our surroundings, and to nature.

Possessive relationships undermine basic human freedom. Although someone in a possessive state of consciousness could conceive that others have a certain degree of freedom, in practice he does not recognize any rights save his own.

The struggle to dominate and obtain something through a relationship inevitably leads to deception and loneliness. Instead of uniting, the possessive relationship separates and, in the end, destroys that very relationship.

The vicious circle of possession and destruction is broken when we understand that our possessiveness hurts those we need to love. We recognize the possibility of participation. This awakening moves us to put aside our instinctive and selfish impulses and to nourish our need to share, participate and offer ourselves to others.

We take the first steps in harmonizing our relationships when we widen our circle of love and learn to cherish others and to suffer for them.

To love more and more people, to work for the good of others without using them for our own advantage helps us to look beyond our own interests: this is how we discover everything that surrounds us and learn to respect it.

To respect is to relate with love, to allow room for people to express themselves, for nature to manifest its wonders. When we have respect, we discover the natural world which nourishes us, the life force in things that until now had no message for us. We discover the world of others. Through respect we become humble and learn how to learn: other people and even our surroundings become our instructors. We discover the teachings that we

never saw before because of our desire that everyone and everything be subject to our will.

Through respect we begin to relate through participation. We change our way of responding to the circumstances of life and other human beings. Instead of reacting favorably to what we like and negatively to what we do not like, we learn to accept. Instead of finding enjoyment or suffering only when we are directly affected, we learn to participate in the joy and suffering of others. Instead of centering ourselves in our own concerns, we learn to enrich ourselves through the experiences of all human beings. In other words, we embrace all that exists with the same expansive love.

Relationship through participation is strengthened by appropriate practices. The basic work consists in creating an attitude of service by being attentive to other people's needs. It is not that we need extra time, money or possessions to help others. Everyone, in his or her place, has opportunities to help at the appropriate moment with understanding, words and especially with deeds. Simple acts (such as cleaning what we didn't get dirty, tidying a mess we did not make, sharing what we have and what we know, taking care of other people's things with the same or even more attention than we would with our own, helping someone else instead of doing something for ourselves, and watching the tone and intention of our words) are good ways to begin learning participation.

When we participate we do not give in to selfishness or thoughtlessness. We work continually on our minds and hearts to generate good thoughts and positive feelings. When we find that we are feeling sorry for ourselves, for example, we replace this feeling with compassion for those who have less

than we do. When we notice that we are preoccupied with some trivial concern, we stop to remember those who suffer--the poor, the sick, the lonely. We remember that there is much to do to alleviate human suffering. These simple practices help us to see that we really carry the world, our surroundings, and other souls within our own hearts.

Relationship through participation teaches us to revere the Divine Principle that is present in everything. We begin to become conscious of our permanent relationship with the world and with all human beings.