

**THE ART OF LIVING
IN RELATIONSHIP**
by Jorge Waxemberg

*Originally published in 1991 as
El Arte de Vivir la Relación
Cuadernos de Cultural Espiritual
Buenos Aires, Argentina*

*Translation © 1994
by Cafh Foundation, Inc.*

Part One: Learning to Relate

Chapter Four: Standards of Conduct

As we learn to establish a relationship with ourselves, we become conscious of the standards of conduct we internalized in childhood. Such self-knowledge makes it possible for us to reinforce the standards that were effective and to work on those which were hindrances, so that we can build good relationships with our fellow human beings.

Standards of conduct have a decisive influence over relationships and it is good not to take them lightly, as if they were mere social conventions. Just as we need to speak the same language in order to understand one another, we also need standards of conduct that form a common basis of respect from which we can establish relationships. By walking the road of respect in relationships, we arrive imperceptibly at compassionate love.

Not everyone gives the necessary importance to standards of conduct, especially to manners. Although we cannot live without norms, sometimes we react against them. On the one hand, we don't want to control ourselves,

but on the other, we don't want to suffer the consequences of another's lack of control. In the end, even the most rebellious among us have to subject themselves to at least a minimal level of standards so that we can live together with some degree of peace.

Acquiring good manners really is a necessary aspect of establishing standards of conduct. Even when we have good intentions, we often have problems in our relationships because we are not conscious of our inconsiderateness or rudeness. Even one instance of tactlessness can irreparably hurt a relationship. Good manners help us to overcome even the most difficult situations. They are irreplaceable assets in our work on relationship.

But we need to remember something: our standards of conduct will help us to unfold spiritually only when we follow them consistently. To reserve good behavior only for certain circumstances while allowing passions and instinctual impulses to go uncontrolled in our daily relationships would undermine our efforts to learn how to live. To be polite in public, for example, but rude and impatient at home cannot be our standard when we yearn to unfold our highest possibilities. We will find it very difficult to keep the spiritual ideal alive and conscious unless we work on one of the most concrete aspects of this ideal: to recognize the Divine principle in every human being. The way of expressing this recognition is to understand each person in his or her circumstances and to work to help everyone, without distinction. Just as we respect our vocation and way of realizing it, we also respect others' decisions and the way they are.

It is very helpful to be on guard against feelings of superiority and pride for they are damaging to our personal relationships. Although a person might mean well, he could confuse help and counsel with giving orders. As long as others follow his advice, he works hard for them, but as soon as they do not follow what he says, he begins to criticize them and wants nothing to do with them. This attitude causes many problems in relationships. It transforms everything into a fight in which one person tries to impose his or her will and opinions while showing disdain for those he or she supposedly wants to help. This attitude leads to bad feelings and resentment; it does not help others and, in fact, can demoralize them. When we are in this state of consciousness, we point out the mistakes and defects of others, forgetting to encourage and appreciate them.

Instead of asking, "What can others do for me?" I can ask, "How do I help others? In what ways can I offer my life, my work and my experience?" That is, we leave aside the attitude of being judgmental and we adopt the attitude of service. Others form part of our own lives.

In the end, good manners and clear judgment are really not enough for helping others. The effort to do good is all in vain if it is not accompanied by an unselfish love and a positive attitude.

Attitude is positive when it stimulates unfolding, inspires others and transmits love through advice which is practical, beneficial and possible to carry out.

A positive attitude supports and nourishes others, instills confidence in their capacity to unfold and gives them the courage to face their difficulties.

A positive attitude also generates happy, healthy relationships, and this in itself is already a big help, especially in times of trials and discouragement.

A positive attitude is not a superficial optimism. On the contrary, it generates in us and in those around us the desire to make whatever effort is necessary and to work and sacrifice ourselves for noble causes.

A positive attitude does not depend on personal success and good luck. Pure faith in the Divine and compassionate love form the basis of a positive attitude. For this reason, those who generate this attitude always behave in the same way, whether they are sad or happy, whether they are successful or not in their endeavors.

Even though it is not easy to express happiness when we are in the middle of a painful experience or to transmit energy and faith when going through troubles and illness, this is just what we are able to do when we live moved by compassionate love. When we see the immensity of the work that humanity has before it, we keep the sorrows of life to ourselves, transforming our pain, through love and sacrifice, into understanding and strength for all human beings.