

LIVING CONSCIOUSLY
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Part One: Understanding Relationships

Chapter One: Conviviality

*The road of spiritual unfolding is a continuous
process of deepening relationships.*

Human beings—although we are not always aware of it—live in relationship. We relate in some way or another with ourselves, with each other, with the world, with the entire universe. We live an organic, but unconscious, relationship with the earth. We establish conscious relationships with other people. And, in the larger picture, we are an indissoluble and inseparable part of the universe.

But, for the most part, we do not recognize our relationships. Usually we are aware of only some of them, especially those that we establish voluntarily. Yet, in spite of what we recognize or understand, we live in relationship—with everyone and everything.

The road of spiritual unfolding is a continuous process of deepening relationships, simplifying and unifying the different ways we relate into a single,

harmonious whole. It is likewise a process of transforming unconscious relationships into conscious ones.

When we think of relationships in this way, love could be considered the conscious, harmonious relationship between two or more beings. Divine Union could be considered our conscious, harmonious relationship with the cosmos.

Although every individual's spiritual life is intimate and profound, it cannot be isolated from the life of the great human community. The foundation of spiritual life is conviviality, and its unfolding depends on the deepening of relationships.

The soul unites with the Divine through souls, through all souls. One embraces the cosmos by including all its parts. One can pursue the infinite only by incorporating the finite. Yet, many times when we seek spiritual unfolding, we are not only unconscious of our relationships but have little understanding of how to live well with others, even in the most elementary way.

Conviviality is an art that we need to cultivate. Human beings have always dreamed of the perfect society and have imagined innumerable utopias, but no organizational change can produce a better society by itself unless we learn how to live together by establishing conscious, harmonious relationships.

Sometimes we overlook this fundamental understanding and strive to live the spiritual life. But we consequently find ourselves living as though we were separate, as if our lives were the only important things in the universe. Spiritual unfolding is impossible if it is disconnected from the unfolding and deepening of the relationship that we have with everyone.

The spiritual tradition that we inherit from all the great religions teaches the first steps we need to take for a minimum degree of human relationship: not to kill, not to injure. That is, we must control ourselves enough so that we do not

cause harm to others. The spiritual tradition also teaches the practice of virtues which help us to accept our neighbor: tolerance, patience, compassion. But we, as human beings have not as yet really learned to live these teachings, even though these imperatives mark just the beginning of a basic human relationship. We still need to find the way to live a permanent and profound relationship between souls.

Spiritual unfolding demands continuous inner work, and this effort, to be effective, needs to be based on a methodic work of perfecting relationships. When we are conscious of our relationships, we make every effort to remove any barriers we place between ourselves and others. We work to master all our personal expressions, gestures, words, and attitudes, and strive to prevent them from separating us from others. We look for that nexus that harmoniously links an individual to other people, each individual to the group, each group to the greater human society. Through self-control, we establish an indissoluble spiritual bond between ourselves and everyone.

We find, then, that it is not enough to meditate, practice ascetic exercises, control the mind and work with the body according to our personal wishes. Our relationships need to be deepened; we work to make harmonious conviviality possible. Conviviality is the point of departure to attain to perfect integration, to Union with the Divine.

Our task, then, is to raise the level of our relationships. We will know how to do this by recognizing a very simple fact: the more harmonious a relationship is, the less obvious it is. Think of the great harmonious relationship of the sun and the planets: they move in silent perfection, in complete union with one another. Likewise, when our relationships are harmonious, they pass unnoticed.

Destructive relationships, by contrast, are always obvious: anger, exaggerated gestures, physical confrontation, shouts, irony and insults leave no doubt that a relationship—an imperfect one, of course—is being established. The genuine, profound relationship is unobtrusive because no personal outbursts mar its harmony.

To live in conscious relationship is to live in participation, the perfection of conviviality.