MENTAL HEALTH

One Day at a Time

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Superiority vs. Inferiority

A concept that is very important to our mental health is understanding the difference between vertical and horizontal thinking. Vertical thinking is defined in that everyone is either better or worse than another person, and that we find ourselves on some sort of social ladder by which we move either up or down--never quite feeling good enough--and always comparing ourselves to others.

Many years ago, Dr. Alfred Adler drew a very practical diagram which follows:

Dr. Adler said there are three of life's tasks: they are love, friendship, and occupation. The true goal is to be perfect, but we have to have the courage to be imperfect,
at whatever level we're at in order to grow toward that goal. The truth is, we will probably not reach that goal in this lifetime.

When people have the courage to be imperfect, then they become just "thans". Oldest children in counseling often feel the need to do and be more than others. I am reminded of a client, who is typical of many, who came in and could not stand a spot of dust in her house. She was determined to make everything perfect, and was getting up at 5:45 A.M. and working hard until midnight and never feeling like what she accomplished was enough. She was into superiority.

Perfectionists are not really striving for perfection, but they are unconsciously striving for superiority. It is hard for a perfectionist to realize that their little game is superiority because they feel inferior. The truth that is difficult to understand is that in order for inferiority to diminish, one must give up superiority.

I remember a client coming in that said, "I feel so inferior."

I replied, "You feel so less than others, right?"
To which he responded, "Yes."
"Then you must give up trying to be 'more than' so that your feelings of 'less than' will go away and you can be a plain 'than'."

When we make the switch from the proving of superiority to the enjoyment of doing, imperfectly, our lives change and improve. We give up the vertical thinking, we let the walls down, and we show the cracks, or imperfections, in our lives. We become human and get closer to those that are important to us in our lives.

It has been my experience that people with vertical
thinking are always looking around, comparing themselves to others -- wondering if they are measuring up, and never quite feeling good enough. As a result of this type of thinking, they have built a wall around themselves, saying, "You aren't going to see any cracks in me." They become defensive and on guard. I see this as particularly true in patients who are great achievers. They are always proving and doing, never learning to enjoy.

What we want to look at is that very often a patient will come in and make the statement, "I have low self esteem": like it is some inborn quality. I try to point out to them that they are into being more than others; and, as a result of feeling more than others, they end up feeling less than others. The truth is, we are all merely "thans". If a person wants to let go of their inferiority, they need to let go of their superiority.

Dr. Dreikurs gave a very enlightening talk several years ago. I quote from his speech:

"I have chosen today only one aspect of psychological importance to present to you for your thought and consideration; the subject of "The Courage to be Imperfect."

"I have found many, many people who try so hard to be good. But I have failed yet to see that they have done so for the welfare of others. What I find behind these people who try to be so good is a concern with their own prestige. They are good for the benefit of their own self-elevation. Anybody who is really concerned with the welfare of others won't have any time or interest to become concerned with the question of how good he is.

"To explain a little bit further I might, perhaps,
present to you two ways of moving on the social scene; two ways of working, of applying oneself. We can distinguish them as the horizontal plane and the vertical plane. What do I mean by that? Some people entirely, and others in certain areas, move on the horizontal plane. That means that whatever they do, they move toward others. They want to do something for others, they are interested in others--they merely function. That is clearly distinguishable from another motivation by which people move on the vertical plane. Whatever they are doing, they are doing it because they want to be higher, they want to be better.

"As a matter of fact, improvement and contributions can be done in either way. There are people who do something well because they enjoy doing it, and others who can do something well because they are so glad to prove how good they are. Even human progress probably depends just as well on the contributions of those who move on the horizontal and on the vertical plane.

Many have done tremendous benefit to mankind actually motivated only by the question of proving how good they are--looking for their own superiority.

And others have done a great deal of good--as we call it, in an unselfish way--without consideration of what they may get out of it.

"And yet there is a fundamental difference in the way things are accomplished: whether you move on the horizontal or the vertical plane you go up, you increase your knowledge, you increase your status, your respect, your prestige--perhaps even your money. But at the same time nobody who moves on the vertical plane is ever only moving up. He is constantly moving up and down, up and down. One day when he does something good he moves a few
notches up; next moment when he makes some mistake he moves back down again. Up and down, up and down. That is exactly the plane in which most of our contemporaries move today. The consequences are obvious. A person who moves on the vertical plane can never be sure that he is high enough, never be sure the next morning that he is not coming down again.

Therefore he has to live with tension and fears and anxieties. He is constantly vulnerable. As soon as something doesn't go well, down he goes--if not in the opinion of others, then in his own.

"Quite different is the movement on the horizontal plane. The person who moves on the horizontal plane is constantly moving ahead in the direction he wants to move. He doesn't move up, but he moves ahead. When something goes wrong, he considers what's going on, tries to find a way around, tries to remedy it. He is merely motivated by interest. If his motivation is very strong, he may even have enthusiasm. But he doesn't think about his own self-elevation; he is interested in functioning instead of being concerned with his own status or prestige.

"And so we can see how on the one side, on the horizontal plane we have the desire to be useful. On the vertical plane we have a desire for self-elevation with a constant fear of making mistakes. And yet most people today, stimulated by our general social values of competition, are entirely devoting themselves to the problem of their own value and self-elevation--never sure that they are good enough, never quite sure that they will measure up; even though in the eyes of their fellow man they may be highly successful.

"Now that points us, then, to a crucial question for those who are so concerned with self-elevation. This
crucial question is the problem of mistakes--making mistakes.

"Perhaps we first have to state a little bit clearer why people became concerned--badly concerned--with the danger of making a mistake. We can perhaps refer first to our tradition, to our cultural tradition. In an autocratic society, making a mistake is unpardonable, intolerable. The king, the master, never makes a mistake because he has the right to do as he darn well pleases.

And there is nobody who can tell him he has done something wrong, except at the danger of losing his head. Mistakes are only possible to be made by subordinates. The only one who decides whether a mistake is made is the boss.

"Making a mistake means thereby nonconformity with the demands: 'As long as you do as I tell you there is no mistake possible because I am right. I say so. Making a mistake, therefore, means you don't do what I tell you. And I won't stand for that. If you dare to do something wrong--that means different from what I tell you--you can count on the worst possible punishment. And in case you have any delusion that I might not be able to punish you, there will be somebody higher than me who will see to it that you will be punished. A mistake is a deadly sin. Making a mistake incurs the worst possible fate.' That is a typical and necessary authoritarian concept of cooperation. Cooperation means do as I tell you.

"It seems to me that our fear of making a mistake has a different meaning. It is an expression of our highly competitive way of living. Making a mistake becomes so dangerous not because of the punishment--of which we don't think--but because of the lowering of our status, of the ridicule, of the humiliation that it may incur: 'If I do something
wrong and you find that I am doing something wrong, then I am no good. And if I am no good, then I have no respect, I have no status. Then you might be better than me.' Horrible thought!

"I want to be better than you because I want to be superior.' But in our present era, we haven't so many other signs of superiority. Now the white man can no longer can be proud of his superiority because he is white; and the man because he is a man and looks down on the women--we can't let him do that anymore. And even the superiority of money is another question because we can lose it. The Great Depression has shown it to us.

"There is only one area where we can feel safely superior: When we are right. It is a real snobbishism of intellectuals: 'I know more, therefore you are stupid and I am superior to you.' And it is in this competitive drive to accomplish a moral and intellectual superiority that making a mistake becomes so dangerous again: 'If you find out that I am wrong, how can I look down on you? And if I can't look down at you, you certainly can look down at me.'

"That is how human relationships today are--in our community just as much as in our families, where brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, parents and children look down on each other for doing wrong and each one trying to prove so desperately that he is right and the other is wrong. Except, those who don't care anymore can tell you, 'You are right, you think, but I have the power to punish you; I will do what I want, and you can't stop me.' But of course, while we feel defeated by a little child who is our boss and who does what he pleases, we still have one thing left: at least we know we are right and he is wrong.
"Mistakes present you with a predicament. But if you are not discouraged, if you are willing and able to take and utilize your inner resources, the predicament is only stimulating you to better and more successful efforts. There is no sense in crying over spilled milk.

"But most people who make mistakes feel guilty; they feel degraded, they lose respect for themselves, they lose belief in their own ability. And I have seen it time and time again. The real damage was not done through the mistakes they made but through the guilt feeling, discouragement, which they had afterwards. Then they really messed it up for themselves! As long as we are so preoccupied with the fallacious assumption of the importance of mistakes, we can't take mistakes in our stride.

"And so this mistaken idea of the importance of mistakes leads us to a mistaken concept of ourselves. We become overly impressed by everything that's wrong in us and around us. Because, if I am critical of myself, I naturally am going to be critical of the people around me. If I am sure that I am no good, I have at least to find that you are worse. That is what we are doing. Anyone who is critical of himself is always critical of others.

"And so we have to learn to make peace with ourselves as we are.

Not, the way many say, 'What are we after all? We are a speck of sand on the beaches of life, we are limited in time and space. We are so small and insignificant. How short is our life, how small and insignificant our existence. How can we believe in our strength, in our power?'

"When you stand by a huge water fall, or see a huge, snow-capped mountain, or are in a thunderstorm--most people are inclined to feel weak
and awed, confronted with this majesty and power of nature. And very few people draw the only conclusion which, in my mind, would be correct: the realization that all of this power of the waterfall, this majesty of the mountain, this tremendous impressiveness of the thunderstorm are part of the same life which is in me. Very few people who stand in awe of this expression of nature stand in awe before themselves, admiring this tremendous organization of their body, their glands, their physiology, this tremendous power of their brain. This self-realization is what we are missing because we are now slowly emerging from the traditional power of autocracy where the masses don't count and only the brains and only the emperor and the divine authority knew what was good for the people. We haven't freed ourselves yet from the slave mentality of an autocratic past.

"How many things would be different in everyone's surroundings if we hadn't lived? How a good word may have encouraged some fellow and he did it differently and better than he would have otherwise. And through him somebody else was saved. How much we contribute to each other, how powerful we each are--and don't know it. And that is the reason then why we can't be satisfied with ourselves and look to elevate ourselves--afraid of the mistakes which would ruin us--and trying desperately to gain the superiority over others. So perfection, therefore, is by no means a necessity; it is even impossible.

"There are people who are always so afraid of doing wrong because they don't see their value; remain eternal students because only in school one can tell them what is right, and they know how to get good grades. But in life you can't do that. All the people who are afraid of making mistakes, who want
by all means to be right, can't function well. But there is only one condition on which you can be sure you are right when you are trying to do something right. There is one condition alone which would permit you to be relatively sure whether you are right or wrong. That is afterwards. [hindsight] When you do something you never can be sure--you can only see if it is right by how it turns out. Anyone who has to be right can't move much, can't make any decision, because we can never be sure that we are right. To be right is a false premise and usually leads to the misuse of this right. Have you any idea of the difference between logical right and psychological right? Have you any idea how many people are torturing their friends and their families because they have to be right--and unfortunately they are? There is nothing worse than the person who always has the right argument. There is nothing worse than a person who is always right morally. And he shows it.

"This right morally and right logically is very often an offense to human relationships. In order to be right you sacrifice kindness, patience if you want, tolerance. No, out of this desire for rightness we don't get peace, we don't get cooperation; we merely end up trying to give the others the idea of how good we are when we can't even fool ourselves. No, to be human does not mean to be right, does not mean to be perfect. To be human means being useful, to make contributions, not for one's self, but for others; to take what there is and make the best out of it. It requires faith in one's self and faith and respect of others. But that has a prerequisite: That we can't be overly concerned with their shortcomings, because if we are impressed and concerned with their shortcomings, we have no respect, either for
ourselves or for others.

"We have to learn the art [of being happy despite our imperfections] and to realize that we are good enough as we are--because we never will be better, regardless of how much more we may know, how much more skill we may acquire, how much status or money or what-have-you. If we can't make peace with ourselves as we are, we never will be able to make peace with ourselves. And this requires the courage to be imperfect; requires the realization that I am no angel, that I am not super-human, that I make mistakes, that I have faults; but I am pretty good because I don't have to be better than the others. Which is a tremendous belief. If you accept just being yourself, the devil of vanity, the golden calf of 'my superiority' vanish. If we learn to function, to do our best regardless of what it is; out of the enjoyment of functioning we can grow just as well, even better than if we would drive ourselves to be perfect--which we can't be.

"We have to learn to live with ourselves and the relationship of natural limitations and the full awareness of our own strengths." {Understanding Yourself & Others, Kathy and Bill Kvols-Riedler; (R.D.I.C. Publications; Boulder, Colorado) pages 33-44}

As I think about this quotation and my experience with people, many of the points that Dr. Dreikurs makes are very valid. I think it is imperative that we have the courage to be imperfect. Thinking on a horizontal plane is extremely important to our personal growth, and his comments on mistakes and dealing with them in a positive manner are definitely a vital part of finding happiness and acceptance for ourselves.
I do disagree with Dr. Dreikurs on the point that we can never be perfect. As Adler pointed out, perfection is the true goal. We need to have the courage to be imperfect; however, we will probably not achieve perfection in this life. But if we have the goal of perfecting ourselves, then we can move toward that objective. There is a time and a place--if not in this life, in the eons to come--in which we can be perfect.

The other point of disagreement that I have with Dr. Dreikurs is his statement that we are a "speck of sawdust"; that we are a "speck on the beaches of life", and that when we look at a huge waterfall, we see how small and insignificant we are. It is my belief that when we see this huge waterfall, we begin to think: "Whose son or daughter am I?" If we can't think that way, then we might choose to think that we are a part of that great natural force of nature, and that we are respected by it.

Despite the former disagreements that I have concerning Dr. Dreikurs' ideas, there are many truths found in his document; however, the thing that concerns me is the relativism of no right and no wrong. I believe that there are absolutes. There are certainly many fields of endeavor in this life where we can take several roads; but there are certain immutable laws of the universe that we cannot break.

It is necessary for us to fully understand the difference between satisfaction and complacency. If we have the courage to be imperfect, we can look at where we are and we can be satisfied with what we are doing to progress toward perfection. When we become discouraged, we often become complacent and give up. I have found that
many clients have become complacent once they are discouraged. As a result, they make no progress. It is important, however, that once we learn to think on a horizontal plane, we can be satisfied with what we've accomplished. Though it may not seem so, we are moving forward. This kind of satisfaction leads to an empowering of ourselves and others. We can then be of good cheer, realizing that all things will work together for our good. As we believe in a Supreme Being or Higher Power and believe that we are indeed children of that Being or Power, then we can move forward and believe in ourselves and those around us.

Maxwell Maltz, in his book *Psycho Cybernetics*, discussed at length about the necessity of getting the goal clearly in mind, and then trusting our bodies and our minds that we will achieve the goal. A man by the name of Brown—in 1949—did a study in which he assembled three groups of people. He pre-tested and post-tested all three groups on their ability to shoot free throws in basketball. The first group practiced free throws daily in the gym. The second group practiced free throws daily in their minds. The third group did no practicing of any kind. There was no significant difference between the group who practiced free throws in their minds and those who practiced free throws in the gym. Although both groups showed improvement, there was a large difference between groups one and two and the group who did no practicing at all.

Understanding, then, that we want to be useful, that mistakes are a part of life, that there is a right and wrong, then we can move toward perfection. And, as Dr. Dreikurs
points out, we can have the courage to be imperfect, to look at our mistakes and learn from them rather than beating ourselves up because of them.

Another area most of us are afraid of is our failures. If we are in a 50-mile race and we go as far as we can go and stop short of the finish because of exhaustion, then we fail. But each time we fail, as we persist, we will fail at a higher level; so our successes are often built upon many failures. It is important that we come to the knowledge that we are enough; that we have our place in the universe; and that we are important and can make a powerful difference. Then we will see others around us as our equals--as just a "than" like ourselves. We can then begin to see the difference between "satisfaction" and "complacency" and empower ourselves and others by allowing ourselves to make mistakes and understanding other's mistakes.
Pain Can Become Our Friend

It has been my experience that all people have feelings. However, as a child, if someone says to us, "Boys don't cry", or, "What are you doing, being a boob?", we may learn to shut off the outward appearances of what we may be feeling. Things that people can feel and share in an appropriate context can be healed.

Carl Jung said that neuroses are the natural product of pain avoidance, and that neurosis is a depression or anxiety. M. Scott Peck's book, *The Road Less Traveled*, opens with a very beautiful treatise on pain:

"Life is difficult.

"This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult--once we truly understand and accept it--then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.

...wise people learn not to dread, but actually to welcome pain, and actually welcome the pain of problems.

"Most of us are not so wise. Fearing the pain involved, almost all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, attempt to avoid problems. We procrastinate, hoping that they will go away. We ignore them, forget them, pretend they do not exist. We even take drugs to assist us in ignoring them, so that by deadening ourselves to the pain, we can forget the problems that cause the pain. We attempt to get out of them rather than suffer through them.

"This tendency to avoid problems and the
emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness. Since most of us have this tendency to a greater or lesser degree, most of us are mentally ill to a greater or lesser degree, lacking complete mental health. Some of us will go to quite extraordinary lengths to avoid our problems and the suffering they cause, proceeding far afield from all that is clearly good and sensible in order to try to find an easy way out, building the most elaborate fantasies in which to live, sometimes to the total exclusion of reality. In the succinctly elegant words of Carl Jung, 'Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering.'

But the substitute itself ultimately becomes more painful than the legitimate suffering it was designed to avoid. The neurosis itself becomes the biggest problem. True to form, many will then attempt to avoid this pain and this problem in turn, building layer upon layer of neurosis. Fortunately, however, some possess the courage to face their neuroses and begin--usually with the help of psychotherapy--to learn how to experience legitimate suffering. In any case, when we avoid the legitimate suffering that results from dealing with problems, we also avoid the growth that problems demand from us. It is for this reason that in chronic mental illness we stop growing, we become stuck. And without healing, the human spirit begins to shrivel." {The Road Less Traveled, M. Scott Pack, M.D.: (Simon & Schuster, 1978, New York, NY 10020), pages 15-17.}

It seems that there is a pain which we all seem subject to that arises from the risks we take in allowing ourselves to love others. There is no suffering quite like that which comes when love is shattered. After years of patiently waiting for what seems like the right time, we may open our heart to
another; and when this happens, we are standing on sacred ground. Every type of love has its risks. When we share love, or any kind of feelings, we are making ourselves vulnerable.

It seems that there are some faulty rules in some families: don't talk, don't feel, and don't be open and vulnerable. Above all, don't think for yourself! When we can break through these inappropriate rules and begin to share our thoughts and feelings in a safe place, then a lot of healing can take place. Sharing the loads we carry in life leads to healing. Admittedly, we can't trust everyone. But as we begin to trust ourselves, we can reach out and choose to trust others and take the risk and share those feelings.

It's almost like there is a valve in our throat that, when we shut off the bad feelings, we also shut off the good feelings. Then we walk around like zombies without feelings. Very often, at times of trauma, we decide to shut down all feelings and not let ourselves be open and get close to anyone again. We build walls around ourselves; those walls are to protect us from the hurt caused by others. What I've seen many times is people walking around, not really connecting with others as people, but bumping into each other's walls.

Some years ago I had a client who had been unsuccessful with both his business and his family. When I asked him for an early memory, he shared how his grandfather had died, and he did it without showing any emotion. After working with him for several months, he came back to tell me how things were working out in his life. He came in very excited about the success he was having. I asked him to share with me his experience
concerning the death of his grandfather. He began to cry and said, "I was very close to my grandfather. When he died, I decided I was never going to take the risk of loving again." At the time of his grandfather's death, he had made a decision that affected the rest of his life. Each subsequent decision he made simply reinforced his original decision.

It seems necessary for us to open up our feelings, realize old decisions, and re-decide new decisions in our lives. We need to have a plan to search out those difficult feelings that have been nearly buried alive because they never died. Very often we will find these feelings located somewhere in our body. When we can: (1) identify what part of our body we are feeling those old feelings--whether in our heart, our shoulders, our stomach, our head; and (2) describe those feelings in the presence of another person (very often a therapist or a close friend), we can recall the time when we first felt those feelings and learn a lot about ourselves and why we are acting a certain way. The discovery and "re-feeling" of those buried feelings gives us an opportunity to re-decide and make new decisions that are more appropriate for the present.

Barbara D'Angeles, in her workshops and books, talks about the steps of going home to feelings. She calls these steps the "emotional ladder". D'Angeles states that the most prevalent feelings, or the feelings that are on the top of the ladder, are anger and blame. Hurt is next, then fear, reason and responsibility, and finally, at the base of the ladder, is love. These steps have been very useful to me in helping clients, when they are angry, to discover the roots of their anger and come down the "emotional
"ladder" to the love that they always feel in important relationships.

Pain can become our friend. We all have feelings. We often hide those feelings and develop neuroses because of our fear of facing those feelings. Some of us were raised in families where we had to protect ourselves and not feel, or think, or talk about our feelings. The sharing of those feelings leads to emotional health. Often feelings can be dug out of the subconscious and shared with someone whom we trust or care about. Those buried feelings bring new insights into our lives. As we do this, we can come closer to those we care about.

We must also become accountable for these feelings; we need to realize that there does exist a chemical imbalance, or endogenous depression, caused by pain or by physical things. More depressions, however, are reactive—caused by our thinking and our environment—than we care to admit. A language of responsibility helps us take charge of the feelings by saying, "I am depressing myself", rather than, "I am depressed".

By our thinking we can create happiness or sadness as we access our memories or what is happening in our lives. Realizing that to some degree, by our cognizant thinking, in most cases we create our feelings, which takes us out of the reaction role.

Bill Riedler, in his book, *Understanding Yourself And Others*, gives some good, responsible definitions for feelings. He states the following feelings and their definitions: anger—scaring others into getting our own way; depression—a temper tantrum turned on ourselves; bored—a way of making someone else responsible for
entertaining us or making our lives work; guilt--a feeling we sometimes create after violating good inhibitions; worry excessive thinking rather than taking action; and love--the feeling we create to help us focus on a person's strengths rather than their weaknesses.

By bringing our feelings to conscious awareness, feeling them (the feelings), understanding them, and taking responsibility for them, we can help ourselves shift to a higher level of responsibility and aliveness.
Understanding the Flow of Relationships

Harvelle Hendricks, in his book, *Getting the Love You Want*, talks a lot about the "fuser" and the "isolator". This fuser/isolator syndrome, according to Hendricks and Mahler, goes back to the stage of separation and individuation, which is the second stage in child development. When the child is between the ages of 18 months and three years, and wants to go away from his mother's side and explore, and the mother is too protective and won't allow him to leave, then the child becomes an isolator, and tends to shy away from close contact with others. When the same child is allowed to go away from his mother's side and explore, and when he comes back, is told to "Go and play, I'm busy right now." instead of being welcomed back, then he becomes a fuser, and tends to cling to his mother or others who are important to him.

In the flow of relationships, people in a relationship, whether it be children or couples, keep a distance between themselves and the other person. This distance is an unconscious commitment not to get too close, because we are afraid of the closeness.

When one person is trying to get close to another person, we find that that person will back away to keep the distance between them. What we do to retain distance is interesting. It can be demonstrated by one person putting their hands on the chest of the other person, and as they pull the other person towards them, that person
wants to push away. But when a person stands back and invites, and does so in a warm and kind manner, the second person is more inclined to come to the person who invites him/her. It is important that we understand that we all have our space; and when that space is violated, it causes us problems. We fear both abandonment and engulfment.

This closeness can be very, very scary. I remember one couple I was working with-- the wife said, "All I want to do is to spend Saturday afternoons with him." Then when the husband committed and said, "Okay, I'll spend Saturday afternoon with you," the wife began to tell him all the reasons why she didn't want him with her. She had realized that she was really afraid of getting close. We all know when our space has been violated. We can stand only a certain amount of closeness.

There is a pulsating to life--light pulsates, sound pulsates, the waves of the ocean have a pulsation to them, and our hearts pulsate. And so in relationships with our wives, husbands, children, or parents, the need for closeness and the need for distance pulsates or changes. As we flow with life, we establish patterns and rituals by which we can get close; whether it be communication skills, playing together, working together, or physical contact. The pulsation, in and out, of the relationship, seems to help us get closer. It's like climbing a mountain. When we head up that mountain we don't go straight up the mountain, but we have to rest. We want to be close, and then when we get to a certain degree of closeness, when we head up the mountain, we have to rest before we can continue. In our relationships, when
we are far away we want to be close; when we get close, we want to be far away. While it is important that we regularly spend time with those that we care about in our relationships, we have to be careful of too much togetherness. Our relationships will grow as we move in and out of closeness in those relationships.

In order to make relationships work, we must be committed to the relationship. It is important that we put people before tasks, and people before other things in our lives. Many of us get so busy with our work that we often offend people because we are so occupied. One of the things that has been important to me, and that I have struggled with, is taking the time to be with a child when he wants to be heard, listening to a spouse when she/he needs time, taking the time to be with parents before they're gone, taking the time to give positive input and to play out the role as friend, father/mother, or husband/wife.

It is very interesting that we are defended against getting what we want. We spend a lot of time complaining. We say that we want love; but when love comes, we become afraid and push it away. What is going on there is that we are so afraid of the loss of love, that we push love away.

It is also true that we can only stand a certain amount of joy. It seems like we have to rest from that joy. If we don't--if we just keep pushing for the joy--then the unconscious mind brings up some of the problems about life that we need to deal with before we're ready. When we realize that joy is a pulsating thing and not push it, then the joy will come to us. Happiness is a butterfly. When
happiness is pursued directly, it will not be there; but it will come and rest on our shoulder when we are willing to live with the pulsations of joy.

There is also a pulsation that accompanies the healing of pain. As Helen Keller said, "The only way through the pain is through the door." However, the healing is a process that flows. We must be willing to heal in doses and then rest from the healing as well as from the joy!
Dealing with the Parents in our Heads and Memories

Many people do not understand how the memories locked in their bodies are getting in the way of relationships, and are keeping them from being fully alive. I remember a client who had a constant heaviness in her heart. And, in discussing her relationship with her son, she said that when he was rebellious she felt this heaviness in her heart. As we explored this feeling, it became obvious the minute she said, "It reminds me of my own rebellion as a child." It has been my experience that as we come in contact with different feelings in our bodies, and allow ourselves to breathe and explore them, we will remember and bring these memories to consciousness.

It has to be clear that our parents did the best they knew how; and no matter how good the parents were, they, in some way, have injured their child or children. It is not about it being our parents' fault or blaming our parents, but we want to come to realize that it is the parents in our head--or how we perceive them--that causes us problems. We must also realize that the perception of each child is different.

When the parents of my wife passed away within a few months of each other, the three daughters were left to clean out the home. As they explored (over a period of two weeks) through the material possessions of their parents, they would pick up different items, and each of the three girls would have different perceptions about the same
item. So what they were really talking about was not the item, but their own internal world.

When we are willing to explore our own internal world, and know what it's about, it can be very fulfilling. When we are willing to share our internal world with someone significant to us, our life becomes deeper and richer. And yet the opposite is also true. It is important that we have respect and awe for another's internal world. The mistake we sometimes make is that your mind and my mind are one--I am right, and I know what's in your internal world. Relationships are hurt by telling people what we think—judging or telling them that we know their internal world better than they do. They often feel offended by this. So, as Harvelle Hendricks said, "Symbiosis is you and I are one; and I am the one." We need to avoid the mistake of assuming another's internal world is the same as ours.

One of the most exciting adventures that exists is to have respect and be interested in how others think. When we realize that people's behavior always has a purpose, and that they may have had different experiences than we think they have had, we can make them feel safe enough to share their inner world as we drop our judgments and hallucinations about their thinking and say, "Tell me what you are feeling or thinking," rather than presuming we are right.
How Kindness and Assertiveness Work Together

In order to thoroughly understand how kindness and assertiveness work together, we must first realize how important boundaries are. It could be compared to living in a room. Some people live in a room where there are all doors. No boundaries are set in this room, and other people can just walk in and out without any permission. Those who live in rooms having all doors lose themselves. Then there are people who have been hurt so badly by others, that the doors they do have are locked and barred; and no one can get in. They are so afraid. These people live a very lonely life.

Probably the ideal way to understand our "inner world" and how we should set boundaries in it, is to picture being in a room with doors that only open from the inside. People will knock and say, "Can I come in?", and you have the right to say no. You are the only one who can open the door. Other times people might ask to come in and you will say "Yes, you may come in for a few minutes, and then you must leave." This gives us control over our lives. That kind of boundary setting seems necessary for maintaining our identity.

It is important that we realize that the only person who can set boundaries for us is ourselves. Very often we become angry when others won't "respect" our boundaries when none have been set. We are in charge of our boundaries.

However, it is important that we understand that
before we give a suggestion, or barge into another person's "world", that we ask permission. So, asking permission might proceed in this manner: "I have a suggestion to give you. Is that alright?" That is like knocking on his/her door; and then if the person says "No," we accept that and say "Okay".

That is how we show respect for their boundaries. If the person says "Yes", and welcomes your suggestion, but then says "I would like you to leave now, I'd like to be alone," or "I'm unwilling to do that," you respect that boundary. Any suggestion given without permission becomes criticism, and that is not respecting another's boundaries.

In order to fully understand how kindness and assertiveness can work together, we must first visualize the emotional circle. At the top of the emotional circle is courage, at the left is fear, at the right is anger, and at the bottom is apathy. The truth is, if we live in fear, we give in; in anger, we become unkind. If we don't respect ourselves we give in. If we don't respect the other person we're not firm. So, the kinder we are, the firmer we can be. Apathy can be reached by anger or fear.
There is, as we look at this emotional circle, a state of courage. When being with other people, we need to have the courage to be assertive, not aggressive--which is manifest in anger--and not passive—which is manifest in fear.

We need to ask ourselves five questions in dealing with people to ensure that kindness and assertiveness work together.

1. "Is the person capable of what I'm going to ask of him or her?"

2. "Is now the time?"

3. "Do I really want them to do this?"

4. "Am I really willing to follow through to the bitter end on this?"

5. "Would doing nothing help?"

When we can answer "Yes" to all five of those questions, then we can move ahead and know that we are respecting ourselves and others and not just nagging. And then we remember that assertiveness is kindness mixed with firmness, not superiority.
We cannot control others—we can only control ourselves. We have an influence on others, but no control. What we do may influence others, but not control them. We often get control and influence mixed up. Influence is an accident, and control is on purpose. Control is about controlling us, influence is about others.

Barry L. Ellsworth, in his book *Living in Love*, gives an interesting paradigm that talks about the letting go of others, and I quote:

"Picture in your mind's eye a beautiful houseboat; you're on a houseboat floating down the most gorgeous river you can imagine. Everything is calm and serene. The water is crystal clear, having its origin in a mountain spring. The water is teeming with all types of friendly, peaceful life there for you to enjoy. You can see intricate formations under the water; beautifully colored fish, and plant life. You might decide to drop anchor for awhile and take a refreshing swim, or dip down and drink fully of the clean, fresh water.

"Along the banks there are fruit trees filled with mangoes, oranges, avocados, grapes, and figs. Everything necessary is there for you. It seems absolutely gorgeous. There are inlets and coves
where you can stop and rest and experience all the delights of the shore.

"On the banks you meet other people. Some of these people seem interested in you; others are going about their endeavors, not noticing you as you pass by. You feel calm and at peace within yourself. Everything is perfect.

"After experiencing the wonders on this part of the river, you begin to feel an urge to continue down the river. You may invite others to join you, and you know that whatever they choose to do is perfect. You know the river has always shared with you the experiences that you have most needed for your personal growth and development. It seems a reminder of what life can be; peaceful, calm, tranquil, secure, and friendly. This is what life seems to be some of the time--why not all of the time?

"Floating down the river is easy. Everything you need is provided if you surrender to the gentle promptings of the river's current. You experience what it offers, and embrace it. The problems you create for yourself come about when you become attached to the people, objects, or experiences on the bank. Rather than continuing to float down this river of infinite love and knowledge, you choose to reach out and hang on to the experiences or objects on the bank. You begin to believe that you know more about what you need in your life with your finite knowledge, than does the river of infinite love and knowledge--the source of life itself.

"The objects are so pleasurable and beautiful that you want to possess them. It might be a wonderful moment in the relationship, a new Mercedes, a new job, or more money. The list of material possessions and emotional fantasies is endless. You become addicted to your emotional experience or to
possessing objects [or controlling others]. That's when the problems begin.

"As you grab on to possess the desired object or experience, the boat comes to a tilting stop. You become the anchor. The current of the river begins to push hard against the boat; or more accurately, you begin to fight against the naturalness of the river's current. The strain is tremendous. After a time, sand and debris in the river begin to lodge against the boat. As it accumulates, ever greater pressure is created, and it becomes increasingly difficult to hold on to the objects. All the while you are becoming more and more frightened. You are afraid to let go for fear of losing what you are clutching. The pressure of the sand and silt steadily builds and your focus on the desired object becomes more and more intent. The tighter you hold on, the fewer choices you notice. Your strength and energy are being drained, yet you continue to hold on.

"If an observer on the bank were to pass by and see this, he could see the whole picture and immediately see the solution--let go. All there is to do is let go." {pages 5-7: Bates Re-publishing, 469 Joy Street; Salt Lake City, Utah 84107--Library of Congress Number: 889249}

The only thing we can control is what we can do in a certain situation, and not what others should or shouldn't do. As well as the fantasy of owning a Mercedes, of wonderful moments in a relationship, of possessions, and of other emotional fantasies, perhaps the biggest fantasy of all is that we can control others. Happiness comes to us when we focus on what we can do.

We have the power of choice. All people are really
agents to themselves; and they have been given that choice probably from the beginning of time. We can only control how we react to what others do, rather than focusing our energies on what they are doing and becoming angry as a way of trying to change them.

The stream, to me, is my belief in a higher power, and that all things will work together for my good. You may believe that, or that the stream refers to the laws of nature. We must, to a certain degree, surrender to forces outside this world that we cannot control. We need not waste our energy on wishing circumstances were different, but take charge of our own lives, acknowledging a higher power in it. And then realize that all things do work together for our good. There is a poem by an unidentified author called *Letting Go* that emphasizes the fact that we can control only ourselves.

To let go does not mean to stop caring, it means I can't do it for someone else.
To let go is not to cut myself off, it's a realization I can't control another.
To let go is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences.
To let go reality.
To let go is not to deny, but to accept.
To let go is not to nag, scold, or argue; but, instead, to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.
To let go is not to adjust everything to my desires, but to take each day as it comes and cherish my self-image.
To let go is not to criticize or regulate anybody, but to try to become is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.
To let go is not to try to change and blame another, it's to make the most of myself.
To let go is not to care for, but to care about.
To let go is not to fix, but to be supportive.
To let go is not to judge, but allowing others to be human beings.
To let go is not to be in the middle, arranging all the outcomes, but to allow others to affect their destinies.
To let go is not to be protective; it's to permit another to face what I dream I can.
To let go is not to regret the past, but to go and look for the future.
To let go is not to fear less, but to love more.

Again, to make our lives happy we must focus on what we can do, rather than focusing on what others should do.
Observing our Behavior and Limiting our Reactivity

Many times we don’t feel like we are in charge of our behavior, and we feel like we are in the middle just trying to react. We can become observers to our own behavior or conscious of what we are doing. The natural reactivity on an unconscious level on the negative side is to fight, flee, or play dead. These are natural impulses. We can play out a scene of frustration or worry or anxiety when the real issue is about relaxing and deciding "What am I feeling?"

We can get in tune with our bodies and where the feeling is occurring in our bodies. That is often an indication of the memories that are stored in the body. When we get in tune with where a feeling or memory is happening in our body, and remember when we first had this feeling, it helps us to understand why we are reacting the way we are.

Very often, in the press of the moment, we feel that we have to react; we have to take care of the situation now. The truth is, that the longer we wait, the better will be our reaction to the situation if we're not into freezing. Time is on our side. Things get better if we have time to think about it rather than react to it. Remember that fighting or arguing requires a high level of cooperation, and is also highly reactive. It takes two to fight. We can, instead, breath deeply and re-hear the person and then decide or choose how we want to react. Either one of the party can, at any time, stop the cooperation of fighting and get into a
different kind of cooperation--of getting along.

Remember that the opposite of acting out is containment. Containment is the ability to lay aside our thinking and our feeling and really hear the other person. When we are containing, we are stretching into the other person's world and finding out what they know. We can then figure out what to do about the situation.

Remember the circle of control and the larger circle, influence, mentioned in the previous chapter. Many times we try and control people outside of ourselves, which we cannot do. We can only influence people outside of ourselves; we can have perfect control over ourselves. We must remember that influence is an accident, and control is on purpose. We can only really control ourselves, and influence others by accident. It is very powerful in our lives for us to figure out what we can do in a situation, and take control, and let others be influenced by our actions.

I recall meeting with a 38-year-old separated lady who was upset because of the way her husband was treating her after the divorce. We focused on how he had treated her in the last 12 years. She said, "Just as he is treating me now." I then asked her why she should expect him to be different now. Our anger is based on the hope that others will be different. We must recognize that we cannot make them different, and then we will be able to calmly express our truth. Several of her friends and persons of influence were trying to put pressure on her saying that he had changed. She thought about it and felt that she would leave the door open, but he had to have a track record. She was not willing to go back to the physically
and emotionally abusive situation.

Another issue that helps with limiting our reactivity is being curious about the reasons another person is reacting. Very often we think we can read another person's mind, where we have a sense of powerlessness because they won't be different, and we want to fix them or correct them. When we are curious about their internal world, and what's really going on within their world, then we can lessen our reactivity.

Pat Love, an accomplished marriage counselor, talks about TMM's or Temporary Moments of Maturity. Our child or mate may become reactive and take off on their rocket, but we do not join them; and that moment of maturity will give us insight into what's going on as well as helping the relationship.

Barbara D'Angeles, in her book, *Making Love All The Time*, talks about an emotional ladder. On the top of the emotional ladder is anger. Under the anger is always hurt; and under the hurt is fear. Under the fear is reason and responsibility, and under reason and responsibility is love. She says that when we are into anger, which is a form of reactivity, that we are far away from home. The more we drop down this emotional ladder, and the closer we get towards the hurt, the fear, the reasons, and the love, the closer we are getting to home. It helps us to be less reactive if we look for the pain that is always found under the anger.

So we observe our behavior and limit our reactivity by: getting past the fight, flee, or play dead syndrome, getting in contact with what we are feeling, dropping the fight, realizing that time is on our side, and figuring out what
we can do to contain our reaction and look for the pain under the anger. This is about the growth and development of our emotional muscles.
The Use of Rituals on our Lives

Rituals may be spelled R-I-C-H-U-A-L-S, because when used on a regular basis, rituals will lead to success. Success is more than money, it's more than status, it's more than prestige. Success is defined as finding something bigger than us. Sometimes money can be used as a measuring stick to help us find success; but it becomes a very shallow measuring stick. Knowledge, also, may be used as a measure of success; however, it also is very shallow. Money and knowledge may be viewed as success only if we use them to help others.

People become rich in their lives and character when they use "richuals". "Richuals" may be defined as those activities we engage in regularly that bring peace and order into our lives. It may be reading, studying, walking, exercising, saving a percentage of our income, or making a contribution to some worthy cause. But whatever activity an individual chooses, the use of "richuals" will bring success. As we gain in these areas, our learning is only useful as it contributes to the lives and is of benefit to others. The real success of "richuals" is the love, friendship, and occupational successes that are created by the consistent use of "richuals". We need to use "richuals" to create a balance in our lives.

We meet our emotional needs by the use of "richuals". Meeting one of our emotional needs may be as simple as listening to someone. Just like there are four physical needs--shelter, food, water, sleep--there are also four emotional needs. These emotional needs are as follows:
1. Time Management

We are more effective in managing our time when we make a list of the things we wish to accomplish. When making the list, we need to remember several things: (a) the list needs to be prioritized, (b) the list is used for direction and not speed, (c) we need to put people first on the list (promises we have made), and (d) we need to schedule time for ourselves.

2. Positive Action

Included in positive action is doing things for others, in secret or otherwise. Positive action also includes our thought process. The formula for this is, Positive Thought=Positive Feelings=Positive Action=Self Confidence. Of course the opposite is also true, Negative Thought=Negative Feelings=Negative Action=Loss of Self Confidence.

3. Personal Growth

We have a need to be growing in some area, or areas, each day. The areas for growth are (a) physical—learning or practicing a skill, (b) intellectual--learning new concepts in areas of study, (c) emotional--sharing feelings or stretching into another’s world by working to understand their feelings, (d) social--reaching out to develop new friendships, and (e) spiritual--meditation, prayer, spiritual reading, or other spiritual rituals.

4. Self-Honesty

There are several ways of being honest with ourselves. (a) The first way to practice self-honesty is to keep commitments to others and do them on time. We can remember these commitments by putting them on our daily lists. (b) We also practice self-honesty when we live our personal code of conduct. The closer we live as we believe, the better we will feel about ourselves. This
includes treating others as we wish to be treated. (c)
Finally, we are honest with ourselves and others when we admit our mistakes and work to change them.

The physical needs have a warning signal. For example, the warning signal for shelter is either being too hot or too cold. The warning signal for food is hunger, for water is thirst, for lack of sleep is sleeplessness.

When our emotional needs are not being met, we get a warning signal also.

However, the warning signals for emotional needs are more general. We may feel discouraged, depressed, and in general we may not feel good about ourselves. When we get any one of these warning signals that our emotional needs are not being met, we need to look deeply and question ourselves. "Am I not being honest in my relationships?" "Am I not using my time well (included in this could be not enjoying relationships or not using time productively)?" "Am I not doing positive things for those around me?" And the final question, "Am I not growing in some way?"

It is important that we meet our emotional needs on a daily basis. The establishment of "richuals" around these needs seems to help us to remember to meet those needs.

Rituals are also necessary for handling grief and pain. When we have loss in our life (whether it be loss of a job, a loved one, or a friend) we will grieve with our experience. By the use of rituals, (a funeral, sharing with a friend, attending a support group), we can learn to mourn. That is the externalizing of our grief. Grieving, when done in regular doses, is a way of letting the pain out with an ebb and flow.
Are You Really Listening?

There are basic reasons why we don't listen, and they are as follows: (a) We want to be right--we would rather be right than be close; (b) we have an agenda about fixing or changing the other person, or we have some belief that we can make them different; (c) we want to win in the power struggle; (d) we are afraid that if we really hear them, then the other person will win; (e) we think that we know what the other person is thinking, and we hallucinate about them; and (f) we want to blame them. These are the reasons for not listening.

Real listening means taking turns--making sure that each person has the opportunity to feel completely understood. As mentioned before, we have to be curious about the other person's experience and not mind read or blame. It is important that we not only go through the motions of listening, but that we listen from our heart more than from our head; and that we listen from a caring position, rather than a position of "I understand you and know what you want." In listening, we project back to a person a very flat mirror that leaves out the interpretation of what they are actually saying. We need to work to understand precisely what they are trying to communicate to us. When we do that, we can stop judging and criticizing.

We have to have an underlying belief in the potential of the other person to heal themselves when they are listened to. This belief is key; otherwise, we are not really listening.
Pat Love, in a workshop, stated that listening leads to differentiation, which means, "I am separate from you, and I can hear and become fascinated by the difference." The following attitudes lead us to listen better and, at the same time, these attitudes are reinforced by listening:

1. I am calm into when people I love are reactive.

2. I can hear different from what I unique.

3. I can choose to be in a relationship.

4. I know that the other person's reality is not mine.

5. I can choose rationality over emotionality and invite people my unknown.

6. I can find a balance by checking in with feelings and checking in with reality.

7. I can speak my truth in the face of adversity.

8. I can remain believe and understand those differences.

9. I can learn to be curious about diversity.
Keeping Commitments to Self and Others

Many years ago, when I was working as school psychologist at Lowell Scott Middle School, I would go into the classroom and ask the children how they liked to be treated. They made great, long lists that addressed this question. I would often ask them if they treated their little brother or sister the same way that they liked to be treated. Very often they could see the discrepancy. Our code of conduct is how we like to be treated, and when we don't treat others that way, then there is a separation between reality and our code. That discrepancy makes us feel bad about ourselves.

We have to be very careful in the promises we make to ourselves and to others. Make them carefully and keep them; because when we do not keep our promises, then it is detrimental to us. Keeping commitments to others builds relationships. Some people, therefore, decide that they will not commit because it is too big of a risk. Commitment always brings risk. We have the illusion that we will find a better person to commit to, or a better family around the corner. Usually, the gold, or the rich relationship, is right under our feet and we don't recognize it.

Very often we become double minded and think that we can commit to two ways of living, or we can commit to two people. Adler had a very interesting statement: "Two plus One is Zero; One plus One is Two". When one person commits to one other person, then that relationship can
grow. When that same person is torn between two other persons and can't decide between them, he/she often ends up with nothing. That is the damage that affairs both to marriages and to families.

Commitment ennobles and builds us; and in today's world we find few that are truly willing to commit. Commitment builds character and reduces selfishness. Knowing that there are true principles and committing to them is very important.

In today's society we hear: Do what feels good, all is relative, there is nothing right or wrong. This existential relativism leads us to the despair and depression that we see now in our society. The laws of nature exist, and we cannot fight them. Cecil B. DeMille said that people cannot really break God's commandments, they simply break themselves against them.

The law of gravity cannot be ignored. We are subject to that law. We can learn other laws to supersede it; but those laws, also, are fixed. There are laws that establish right and wrong. It is true that there is not always a single "right" answer for each situation we may encounter in our lives; but there are basics that we must be careful of, and there are truths and principles that do not change. This is not to be confused with those who destroy people over their lack of openness to ideas that are different that theirs, or those who are intolerant of different views. However, tolerance is not to be confused with selling out on ourselves or breaking God's laws.

In this understanding of right and wrong, it is important that we comprehend the relationship of guilt and shame. Guilt says, "I made a mistake, and I need to
change it." Shame says, "I made a mistake, and I am bad." Healthy guilt brings about growth and change. We cannot always control what happens to us in this life; but we can control how we react to it.

In their book, *Conscious Loving; The Journey to Co-Commitment*, (1990, BantamBooks, 666 Fifth Avenue; New York, NY, pg. 119) Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks stated, "We were at first mystified by the amount of wasted energy in relationships around the issues of broken agreements. Then we realized that many people are so terrified of the closeness and radical aliveness of a co-committed relationship, that they will do virtually anything to mess it up. When given a choice between drama and actual closeness, many of us will choose drama."

When we commit to a goal with people and achieve the goal, we create closeness. Our fear of the closeness is often what keeps us from achieving the goal. The Hendricks had an experience at a workshop where a very dynamic group of people set a monetary goal that every one of them could have easily achieved on their own. Because of their fear of closeness, they fell a few dollars short of their goal. If we will commit to those in our lives with clear goals and recognize our fears, we can achieve the friendship and closeness we seek in our lives. Thus we can grow and live in the love of commitment.