

# Marriage and Relationships in the Age of Energy Awareness

*From a workshop, "Men, Women, Love, and Marriage" led by Nayaswami Asha on June 5, 1999.*

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Part 1: The Perfect Relationship –  
What Are We Looking For Really?

We're talking today about marriage. And marriage, really, is just a focused expression of relationships generally. I like to think of marriage as the graduate school of relationships. It isn't all that different from our other relationships, but it's a much more demanding and deeply focused course. And, like all of life's lessons, the sole purpose is to help us find happiness and freedom from sorrow and suffering.

I've lived in the Ananda communities almost since I graduated from high school and left home. I came to Ananda in 1969, so it's been forty-eight years, and I've long been thoroughly comfortable with this way of life.

I remember our first Thanksgiving celebration here at Ananda in Palo Alto. Some ninety people came to our banquet, and the next day one of our members went around telling his co-workers, "We had an intimate Thanksgiving gathering of about ninety family and friends."

Whenever we have a "small" party at Ananda, it's usually at least twenty-five. And it's possible because we've

lived together and learned to nurture our relationships for a long time.

One of the greatest lessons that living at Ananda teaches us is the art of creating harmonious relationships. And in the process, there's a special emphasis on using our friendships to discover some profoundly fulfilling aspects of our own lives.

You can't live in a community such as ours without learning to get along, because it's the only way you'll be happy. Although we have our separate homes and apartments, we're in such close contact that it's also the only way the community can survive.

I had been at Ananda for about ten years when I married the second time. My second husband and I were together for thirty years, and the lessons we learned were priceless.

Paramhansa Yogananda said, "Friendship is based on mutual usefulness." And I imagine it could seem callously manipulative - "You're useful to me, so I'll choose you to be my friend." But if we look at our friendships objectively, I think we'll invariably find that our best friendships are those where we're helping each other in some way.

So it isn't so much that we're getting something out of it, but how much we're helping each other, and how we're growing by helping the other and embracing each other's realities.

There came a time when my second husband and I decided to go our separate ways. We felt that we had accomplished what we could through being useful to one another in a marriage, and it was time to find our expansion through other paths.

Nevertheless, the lessons of those thirty years were many and lasting. And although I'm now wholly committed to the monastic life, and I'm no longer teaching classes in relationships, or serving as a relationships counselor, I'm grateful to God and to my ex for the lessons we were able to learn together.

I married the first time when I was nineteen. I was with my first husband for five years, and then I had a nice long break of ten years when I lived as a nun at Ananda Village.

I like to think that I started out doing marriage badly, but I ended up doing it fairly well. And of course, we never stop learning to expand our hearts through our relationships. But if I've learned one thing in my marriages,

and my relationships with many friends over the years that I feel might be worth passing along, it's that the process of making a relationship harmonious and mutually fulfilling is absolutely a minute-by-minute job.

The best relationships are created fifteen minutes at a time. And the best way to grow in our relationships is to honor and apply a few basic principles that we can apply in every moment.

In my experience, there's no such thing as getting a relationship set up perfectly at the start and then expecting that it will run smoothly forever. If you try to set it up perfectly in the hope that it will stay there, you quickly discover that it can't thrive if it's based around unrealistically rigid rules. And if you rigidly and dogmatically try to follow your little set of rules, you'll just find that it's a surefire recipe for sapping the life out of the relationship and killing all of the joy.

People are constantly changing, and our relationships work best when we stay adaptable and willing to learn and grow. If we stop welcoming the opportunities to learn and grow, we soon find our relationships withering and dying.

People too often want their relationships to be a comfortable place where they can settle in and turn off

their brains and stop trying. And that's just not how life works.

A healthy relationship can never be about applying fixed rules and formulas. It's not about following a little collection of maxims out of a self-help book: "When he says X, I should reply Y." The focus always has to be on learning to work with ourselves as unique, dynamic, continually changing individuals, and finding out how we can understand ourselves and those who are closest to us.

It's ultimately about discovering the art of understanding people. And when you get right down to it, it's about getting to know ourselves.

Paramhansa Yogananda said that what all people are seeking can be boiled down to an irreducibly simple formula: behind the multiplicity of our stated motives, what we all want is to find greater happiness, and to escape from suffering. Yogananda said that even the murderer is thinking, however delusively, that he'll remove an impediment to his own happiness by depriving another person of his life.

Yogananda said that the happiness that all people are seeking comes by expanding our awareness to embrace an ever broader reality. And this is the single most important

principle in our relationships. It's the greatest challenge of a relationship, and the greatest fulfillment, to learn to relate meaningfully and compassionately to the other person's reality, exactly as they are.

Our relationships are ultimately intended to help us find happiness and freedom, by working with ourselves and our partners as we are, and expanding our awareness to embrace the other person's reality.

I love to watch people – not with cold objectivity, but with a heart that's fully engaged. I love to watch what happens when people behave in certain ways. And over the years, I've identified some of the patterns that people repeat in their relationships and that help them succeed or fail.

I think these patterns offer us important hints about what works and what doesn't. And this is what we ultimately need to know – the patterns in our relationships that move our energy in the right direction, toward inner expansion and happiness.

In the early days at Ananda Village, there were basically two jobs that you could have. You would either find yourself working in the garden or the kitchen. No one

told you where to work, but there were very few jobs available, and those were the two main options.

I remember a summer day when we received word that the gardeners needed some extra help. I found myself out in the bean field with a ridiculously simple task. Our watering system was extremely primitive, just a hose that fed water into the channel between the rows of beans. My job was to make sure the water flowed unobstructed. And it didn't seem like much of a job, but the gardeners told me it was very important, because even a tiny rock could block the water and make it overflow the channel, and then you'd end up with a muddy mess and lots of unwatered plants.

So I had to be very attentive, and I've always remembered it as a concrete and uncannily accurate image for how we behave in our relationships. You'd think that we would want to water our relationships and keep the channels clear so that they would be fruitful and give us what we want.

We're very intelligent about visualizing and verbalizing what we want. But then our energy gets diverted by a little clod of dirt, and our energy and attention flow off in



unconstructive directions. And not only does it fail to water the relationship, but it spells its certain doom.

In plain English, our smallest and seeming least significant words, thoughts, and actions, and the direction of our attention, can have a tremendous influence on the health of our relationships.

I could talk at great length about how our past actions, including our actions in past lives, influence our present behavior. It's an important and very interesting subject, because those past actions have a powerful influence on our present behavior.

Who we are is the result of our cumulative thoughts and actions in the past. And we need to understand those inner tendencies, because it's very important to understand how they can rise up seemingly out of nowhere in a relationship and bite us hard. And once we've identified those patterns, we need to understand how to change the ones that aren't helping us.

When we become more clearly aware of those barely conscious tendencies and reactions, it can have a very beneficial effect on our relationship, because it helps us become more compassionate toward ourselves and toward our partners. And it helps us understand why getting along

with others isn't as simple and straightforward as it might seem.

We need to watch out for our positive and negative traits from the past, and understand that they can be deeply rooted and difficult to change. One of the great things that our relationships can teach us is that we aren't always fully in control of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. And it's those involuntary reactions that can wreak absolute havoc on a relationship, unless we can begin to observe them objectively and understand the need to turn their energy into more helpful channels, if we would find greater happiness and freedom.

I can't hand you a simple method that will empower you to fix your relationships forever. But I do hope that I can help you understand some principles that will help you be successful in the journey.

In our culture, it seems almost as if there's a curse on relationships. We've chosen to be born into this world at a time when the planet is emerging from an age of matter awareness, where people generally believed that the material world was the only reality, and where they tended to think in rigid, formal ways.

Until the twentieth century, people felt that following a set of rigid rules was the best way to organize their lives, including their marriages, and their social and religious institutions.

But the world today has entered an age of energy-awareness. It began roughly at the time of the scientific discovery, in the early twentieth century, that energy, and not matter, is the underlying reality of all creation.

Looking around us today, we see the tremendous effect of the new energy-awareness. All of the major inventions of the last hundred years have been based on figuring out how to use energy in countless practical ways - from the telephone, to the automobile, to radio and TV and computers and smartphones.

Many of us decided that we wanted to be born and take part in this exciting new era. We are people who love to be among the first adopters of the latest energy-based gadgets, or we're the engineers who delight in creating them.

The fact that we're caught between these two great ages explains to a very large extent the problems people are having today in their relationships. It explains why we've lost interest in the old, rigid forms, and why we

aren't completely clear about how to work with the more fluid and adaptable energy-based reality to create a happy life.

The ancient Indian teachings have a name for this new age of energy, which they called Dwapara Yuga. Sri Yukteswar expounds the ancient teachings in a book called *The Holy Science*, where he describes the four great ages of human history and how they rise and fall in grand cycles of 24,000 years.

Sri Yukteswar said that the new energy age began around 1894, close to the time when Einstein announced his discovery that energy, and not matter, is the underlying reality of cosmic creation.

Yogananda came with a special dispensation from God to help people understand how to work with energy to find success in their relationships, including their relationship with God.

Matter is rigid and unyielding. Energy is flowing, flexible, pliable, adaptable. Many people feel frightened and insecure to see the old, rigid forms crumbling. This is why God sent Yogananda to the West to explain how people can apply the laws of energy to create meaningful, moral and spiritual lives.

In a conversation with Swami Kriyananda years ago, he made a statement about relationships that I absolutely did not want to hear.

He said, “Relationships between men and women are never going to work until people change completely.”

He said, “Everything that people have in their mind now is subconscious. All the expectations, all the thoughts are coming out of subconsciousness.”

He wasn't referring to the subconscious in the way psychology understands it, as the place where our memories are stored. He was saying that most people hold dreamy, highly unrealistic images of relationships based on their sentimental desires. And what's needed, if we're ever going to learn to adapt and survive in the energy age, is to shake off those dreamy images and start looking at our relationships with a clear and objective eye.

Our culture has adopted some terribly false myths about relationships from movies and books and magazines, and most people aren't aware how completely they've been led astray by those unrealistic messages.

The confusion about relationships is a symptom of a much greater confusion about values. It's a symptom of the transition between two great world ages. Fortunately, the

yoga teachings very clearly describe what's happening at this time, and what we can do about it.

A hundred years ago, people were still riding in horse-drawn carriages. As I mentioned earlier, all of the inventions that have revolutionized society in the last century were based on the astonishingly rapid expansion of our awareness of energy and its applications.

There's a wonderful book that describes the natural cycles of human consciousness throughout earth's history, and the changes that the world is undergoing today: [\*The Yugas: Keys to Understanding Our Hidden Past, Emerging Energy Age, and Enlightened Future\*](#), by Joseph Selbie and David Steinmetz. It offers tremendous insights for understanding where humanity now stands, and where we're going.

When the great shift began in earnest, around 1900, there was a predictable rigidity about relationships. Women were expected to marry and raise children, and men were expected to work to support the family.

When the man came home, the woman had dinner on the table, and the children ate with their hair combed and their best manners.

When my mother-in-law was in her eighties, we browsed through an old picture album together, and we came upon a photo of an attractive young woman taken in the 1920s. She wore an elegant gown and stood beside a grand piano. My mother-in-law said, “This was Mildred. She wasn’t married, and she went to New York to study piano.”

I thought, “So Mildred went to New York. What’s the rest of the story?”

But for my mother-in-law it *was* the story, and it was sensational. Mildred hadn’t married, but had rebelled and run off to study piano in New York.

She had to say it three times before I realized what an extraordinary thing it had been for Mildred to do. Today, we wouldn’t give it a second thought. We were born at a time when the world was being swept along by the full flood of the great transition, but my mother-in-law was already in her advanced years when the old ways began to fall apart.

It isn’t as if we started the new age with a fresh understanding of relationships, fully formed and ready to take up. We’re still very much behind the curve, and confused and conflicted about our roles, because we’ve broken the old mold and we don’t have a new one.

Nowadays, when we enter a relationship or get married, we no longer have the security of the old model that told us what to do and what it all means and where it's going.

My first husband's parents had a fine relationship for sixty-seven years. But my mother-in-law confided to me that the first twenty-eight years were absolute hell. I don't imagine many couples would be willing to endure twenty-eight years of hell, but they stuck it out, and they finally broke through.

In the end, they had something wonderful, and the old, rigid form that they were trapped in forced them to make the effort.

Of course, it doesn't mean that everyone who sticks to it will succeed. There are sixty-five year marriages that are pure hell, and there are no guarantees. But at least the old, rigid forms kept people from running away at the first little snag, and it gave them an incentive to keep working at it.

I don't favor the old system. I don't think it was better. It was based on a very shaky assumption that if you lived by a set external rules and definitions and got the external form of your marriage right, you would be



okay. Today, people are feeling an urge to explore the inner energies of their relationships, and not just the outward form. A cosmic force is inspiring us to want to work with the inner, emotional factors, and not just try to neatly arrange the outside.

People are demanding to live by values that come from inside, and that they can understand with inner, personal knowing. We want to be authentic and true to ourselves. But at this point we aren't quite sure what those inner laws and principles are. We don't understand ourselves very well, much less do we understand the extraordinary responsibility that comes with looking for our own rules, instead of simply adjusting our outward behavior to a rigidly prescribed rule book.

We're committed to going our own way, following our own star, and deciding what will fulfill us. But there's a snag in the new freedom, which is that it takes tremendous effort, emotional maturity, self-discipline, self-sufficiency, and stoicism to make it work.

So, sad to say, there still isn't a free ride.

When the old forms were strong in our consciousness, we had secure boundaries that we could work within. It wasn't a perfect system, but it gave us a rather noble

ideal to guide our behavior, and there was a feeling that following the rules would give us stability and security.

There was an enormous amount of sacrifice. And now that we've broken free of the old rules with their promise of security, what we really haven't understood is that the level of sacrifice that's required hasn't changed.

The changes that have us feeling so confused today actually have nothing to do with relationships. They reflect an all-encompassing new reality that we've barely even begun to understand.

How can we find happiness and inner freedom? It's a simple question with tremendous implications. And it's the fundamental question at the heart of all true spiritual teachings.

Working to become good at relationships can be extremely helpful to us spiritually, because the principles of successful relationships and the spiritual life are exactly the same. As I mentioned earlier, the first principle is that happiness comes to us unfailingly whenever we expand our awareness and become more compassionate, kind, loving, generous, and wise in our work, our play, our relationships, and anything that we do.

What do we want in our relationships? In our mind's eye, we see rosy-colored image of a relationship where we are able to be close, to be soft, to be intimate and open to one another, and receptive to each other's needs. And today, a great awakening is needed, to balance the soft, receptive, happy image with a realistic view of the strength and self-discipline that it takes to achieve real expansion. Because it's not easy.

Just a few decades ago, women approach marriage in a very conscious and deliberate way, with a very clear vision of what they wanted, and how they could get it. And it wasn't considered calculating, because it was simply how women had to work with the reality of their lives under the old system.

"I want a nice home, and I want to raise children, because it's my role as a woman, and I need to find someone who's willing to work hard to support me in fulfilling my dream."

It wasn't considered manipulative, because it was simply the only option that most women could choose.

It's very interesting today how so many women are extremely suspicious of that urge in themselves. And it's a sign that we're breaking away from the old forms.

I don't think you should marry for what you can get out of it. But I do see two things that we need to be aware of today. One is to have a realistic picture of how much it's possible to truly love someone. And the second is how you understand the process of making a life together.

Those are earthy, practical considerations that we need to be very clear about in the new age of energy-based relationships.

We need to understand what it's realistically possible to get from a relationship, and how we can make a relationship work so that we'll get it. Let's face it, these are questions that demand to be answered in a very earthy and straightforward way, with our feet planted firmly on the ground.

This much, at least, hasn't changed. A certain earthy practicality is still the absolute foundation for thinking about starting a relationship. We still need to think about what we can realistically expect, and how we can make it work.

The ideal of love and intimacy is very hard to achieve in the real world. But I don't think it's anywhere

as difficult as making a life together. And making a life together is where there's been the greatest breakdown.

Someone asked me about the idea of an amicable separation, where you love someone, but you realize it isn't working, and you decide to let it go in as friendly and harmonious a manner as you can.

You enjoy a rapport with the other person, but you aren't able to make a life together, because your fundamental values don't mesh. Your natures aren't geared to wanting the same things in your lives. And because everything today is so wide open, you have lots of options for setting up a relationship that will work for you. You have a range of choices that would have been unthinkable, just fifty years ago.

In the old system, where everyone had their well-defined role, the little, microscopic differences tended to be absorbed into the natural flow. You couldn't run away, and if you were wise, you learned to accept the other person's quirks. But in the new system, those tiny differences can have a huge impact, because we now have the freedom to weigh how much we're willing to accept, and how much we won't stand for.

Let me digress. I believe we could cure most of the world's ills by creating communities. Most people formerly lived in fairly tight-knit small communities, but the system broke down with the new emphasis on the individual, which is another feature of the energy age. Communities also broke down and became more cold and impersonal because of the increasing emphasis on accumulating wealth.

The problem with the older type of community is that it wasn't self-selecting. It wasn't created by people who chose to live together because they shared something meaningful in common.

Communities of like-minded people are a giant step forward from the old non-communities where people simply gathered because it was a convenient way to earn money and get electricity and indoor plumbing, or because it's where their parents lived.

In communities like Ananda, people have a chance to work more consciously on their relationships. They can test the spiritual principles they've read about in the scriptures and find out if they work. And because the people in the Ananda communities are willing to bend and change and learn and adapt, the result is that you have successful

relationships that are fulfilling for the partners, and that can serve as models for others.

Another great change today is that people have deeply fragmented relationships with their families. Some people are still fortunate to have strong family ties from cradle to grave. But it's increasingly rare - again, thanks to the new energy-based reality, where we're able to move about and change our lives more freely, to the extent of even loosening or dissolving our ties with our own family.

And because it's so rare to stay close, some of the nutrients in our human relationships have become diluted or lost. Meanwhile, there's a false idea that we should rush out and try to get the missing ingredients from the first available source.

Swami Kriyananda said, not without a certain amount of sarcasm, "No two people can ever be all in all to one another unless they're exceptionally stupid!"

You can't expect to get all of your heart's nutrients supplied in a single relationship. I'll occasionally see people in a relationship that seems pretty good, until they start to bump up against the built-in limitations of any relationship.

A problem today is that we don't understand when we've reached those natural limits, and so we may expect

too much of our partners. In the past, people were more likely to know what they were getting into, and what the limits were, because the boundaries were widely recognized and clearly defined. So they didn't expect to have a single, perfect relationship that would satisfy all their needs. It's why people who tend to have a more realistic view of relationships are more likely to have friendships outside of their marriages, and mutual friends with their partner.

I've been struck by how well this system works in India, where they still have arranged marriages. I've led a number of pilgrimages to India, and I've been amused by how the Americans are always absolutely fascinated with the concept of arranged marriages. And the Indians, for their part, are utterly stunned by our system.

We've had the same tour guide for a number of years. When he started guiding us, he was twenty-four and single. He's a dynamic, handsome, western kind of Indian, and when he finally married, he and his wife chose each other first. But several of our guides had arranged marriages, and the Americans would invariably ask them, over and over, what it was like.

I was amused by our tour guide's brother. His parents had helped arrange a marriage for him to a very nice



woman. And whenever people asked her what she thought of the arrangement, she would say, very happily, “My husband is fine, but my mother-in-law – now, she’s terrific!”

To her, it was the whole package. The husband was part of the picture, and he was fine, and she was perfectly content with him. He worked in a bank and he was a stable and honorable guy. But the mother-in-law – wow, she was the grand prize.

He wasn’t hurt by it at all. He was very happy that his wife liked his mother, because he knew it would make his life a lot easier. He knew the system, and how it would work for them together. So there was an ease and naturalness about it.

Some of the Americans asked our guide, “How can you have your marriage arranged like that, where you maybe don’t even know the woman?”

His answer was very devotional and wonderful, even though he wasn’t a notably devotional man.

He said, “God knows who my wife is.”

Meaning, whether I meet her, or my mother brings her home, it’s all under the guidance of a force that’s much larger than my little ego. If I imagine that I’m the one who’s running things, I’m just being childish. And what

does it matter which human channel God might choose to give me His guidance?

Of course, there's a whole bunch of stuff that goes along with the system of arranged marriages, and I'm not saying it's perfect or that it always works. But there are some clear principles in it that I think would be well worthwhile to consider. And I think the key is that the nature of our relationships, and their outcome, is not always entirely under our control.

Certainly, it's my life to do with as I please. And the circumstances of my life, also, are somewhat under my control. But my outward circumstances are not the definition of my life. They are not my happiness. They're merely the circumstances that I've been given to work within.

Now, I think our American system of taking initiative, and being dynamic and changing our circumstances, and having a lot of freedom is really great. But we have to understand, very clearly, what comes along with it.

Part 2: New Forms for Partners –  
Relationships in a Dawning Age of Energy-Awareness

When I talk about the old relationship forms breaking down, and old gender roles crumbling, I think it's good to remember that a very definite catalyst for these changes has been the profound changes in the consciousness of women. And there's no way we can talk about the nature of relationships today without trying to understand those changes.

If I wasn't a woman, I could never say some of the things I do, because if they came out of a man's mouth he'd be run out of town. But being a strong and independent-minded woman, I've given a lot of thought to women's issues, and I'm not shy about saying what I think.

Before we can talk meaningfully about relationships, there are a few things we need to understand and agree upon. In other words, "Let's face it, these are the ground rules." And if we're going to make the relationships game work, we have to play by the rules. We cannot simply wish that the rules were different, or that we can change them.

The rules weren't created willy-nilly by someone with an axe to grind. They've come into existence as a result of cosmic forces operating outside our influence, in the context of these particular times. And one of the changes today is that gender roles have become more flexible.

Our gender identities have gotten more blended and mixed-up, and women have helped shift that dynamic, but they haven't quite figured out how to turn back around and relate to men.

The men, meanwhile, are being challenged to reconsider their traditional roles, while at the same time they can't figure out where they're supposed to land in the new scheme of things.

When we talk about women and men, what we're really talking about is feminine and masculine energy. And it's only partly about men and women considered as separate entities. Because these energies exist in a spectrum, and every man and woman has the potential to experience a unique balance of male and female qualities within their own nature.

So when I say "women," I'll mostly be talking about feminine energy. And because it's an uncontroversial way to think about it, I'll bring in the symbol of *yin* and *yang*,

where impersonal cosmic nature is always trying to balance the opposite qualities that make up the whole.

It's a convenient way to talk about relationships in an age of energy, because no one feels offended when you talk about pure energy, without hinting at a battle between polar opposites, or an argument about which one is better.

Yin energy is feminine, yang is masculine. And it's generally the yin energy, the feminine energy, that's sensitive to the nuances of relationships. And it's yang energy that can go out and look at the big picture and drive forward to accomplish things in the world.

Lots of women today are very yang, and lots of men are somewhat more yin, partly because the fixed points on the gender spectrum have been set loose and gotten mixed up as a result of the more fluid general energy-awareness that has entered our consciousness today. And men are getting beaten up for being too yang, to the point where they're trying to be more yin. But then the yang women are complaining that the men are too yin. So there's less of a balance in the energy of our relationships that can satisfy everyone.

In fact, what we're looking for in our interactions with the other sex is a balance. After living with my second

husband for several years, I began to understand that it makes no difference who puts out one kind of energy or the other, so long as there's a balance. Because it isn't just standing up for one side that will satisfy and fulfill us, but the feeling that we're balanced within ourselves.

Some of the relationships I've observed over the years have been completely reversed from the traditional idea about the gender roles. The man was yin and the woman was yang, and they worked fine together because the net result was a lovely balance, and everybody was happy. But regardless of the shift in gender energies, you cannot have an intimate relationship without a balance.

Women are determined to get into yang energy nowadays, in part because the modern world demands it, and we can no longer expect to be comfortably married and taken care of.

To be married and taken care of means that you don't have to think about conquering the world. You can draw a circle around your space and make it beautiful and warm, in all of the traditional yin ways that can be very satisfying. But because women have become more yang, it has taken the traditional schematic and tipped it over.

Also, there's a great deal of false teaching about gender and relationships. And I call it false, because it doesn't bring us happiness.

Women have failed to understand that they can't be unrelentingly yang, and still expect to find the kind of inner balance that will give them a genuine sense of fulfillment. Women today are taught to stand up for themselves and speak their lines and not let men dominate them. I've heard a number of you say this, and I'm not suggesting that you take a subservient role, because that's not a healthy path for anyone, either.

In my first marriage, I basically became my husband's disciple. It was wonderful training for me, and he was a fine fellow, very intelligent and warm and wonderful. But it wasn't a good marriage.

Swami Kriyananda said to me, "If you want to be with him next time, why don't you have him be your brother? It would be fine. But you're not a good married couple."

Our problem was that we were so much alike that we were always playing the same note. And it wasn't enough to make a life together, because it wasn't a balance. So I literally disappeared. In an effort to try to create a

balance, I became his disciple. And he wasn't a guru, so it wasn't a healthy situation for either of us.

People sometimes ask me, "How can I tell when a relationship is over?" And I say, "Ask your mother."

Your mother will usually know. After my first marriage ended, my mother and sister confided that they could never figure out what was more remarkable, that I was willing to be subservient, or that he wanted me to be that way. I don't think it was conscious on my part, it was just something I dove into, and I stayed there until the marriage ended.

At the same time, I've come to appreciate that feminine psychology has a certain reality of its own, and male psychology has its own very different reality. And I think it's completely unrealistic for most people to assume that they can find a perfect balance in their own selves without learning to relate to the other sex.

People who've chosen to incarnate in a male body have a certain dynamic that they've decided to work with, and people who've chosen to incarnate in a female body have another dynamic that they're working out. And not to take that into consideration, but to imagine that we can simply dismiss it with a wave of the hand or by a bit of



intellectual word-juggling, or by adopting an aggressive strut, will result in what we very commonly see today, which is a great inability to hold our lives together and feel inwardly whole.

I've observed that people are often attracted on a spectrum, with a super-yin energy at one end and super-yang at the other. And if you're attracted in a healthy way, where the relationship creates a good balance, you tend to be attracted about equally, and the balance fulfills you.

An extreme example would be a big, macho guy who likes a dumb, sexy, very girly girl. It's an extreme example, but if you find that you're nicely balanced, even in such an extreme way, it can help you find an inner balance that might open doors to have an expansive and satisfying relationship.

But then it sometimes happens that one partner starts scooting toward the center. And that's what's happening for many women and men today. They start out nicely balanced with each other, and then very often the woman will start scooting toward the yang position. Or just as often, he'll start scooting toward a yin position, and then she suddenly finds her inner sense of security weakening,

because instead of playing the big, strong, protective male, he's starting to think about how he feels.

One man wrote very convincingly: "If men actually thought about how they feel, do you think that they could do the kind of work they have to do? Do you think they could go off to those jobs every day and do that work?"

He said, "They have to suppress how they feel. And when you start pressing them to be more open about their feelings, maybe they'll start getting into it, and it might not be what you wanted."

So much is written about the female side that it helps to get the male end of the story once in a while.

Men have learned, as this man wrote, not to be too sensitive. He said, "We were trained not to be sensitive. We were trained not to cry. We were trained to play football. We were trained to go into the Army. We had to train ourselves in these professions, and go to work every day and do these jobs, and work overtime and not ask questions about it. And it was all fine. But now we come home and the woman wants us to be sensitive and vulnerable, and all these things. So we start doing it, and then we don't want to do the other part anymore."

He said, "And it makes it very hard on both ends."

The risk is that you'll lose respect on the job, and you'll create resistance at home, if you're a man and you suddenly start to become more yin than the woman in the relationship had bargained for.

The reason we have these blended-gender relationships today is that it's our nature. Our nature is to crave a balance, because we instinctively know that it will bring us a sense of wholeness and fulfillment.

We're longing, as Paramhansa Yogananda said, to expand our awareness, because we intuitively know that it's how our happiness will increase. And one way to do that is to open up to the qualities that we've been suppressing in ourselves.

The longing for a balance of yin and yang is part of our nature. We're born on the yin or yang side, as determined by our physical bodies. And maybe your temperament from past lives also plays a role. But generally speaking, there's at least some temperamental connection to the male or female body that we're born in. And it's a place to start learning to access the opposite energy and find the balance that will fulfill us.

The key is freedom. You need to be free to become whatever your life is asking of you. And if you suddenly

find yourself divorced, and you have to start making money, you'll need to become somewhat more yang. And if you have a tremendous drive for a career, maybe you'll need to be more yang.

But if you get too far off center, you'll find that it isn't working, and it's not sustaining you in the long term.

If a man becomes little more than a money-making machine, entirely yang and lacking any yin feeling, he'll wither inside. You see those men at the end of their lives, and there's nothing sweet about their nature. So they've lost, and everybody in their lives loses.

We're tremendously attracted to the qualities that complement us, and we want to experience them close-up and firsthand - so we can expand our consciousness to include it, to become sympathetic, and to understand what moves our opposite.

Women want to be understood by men, and men want to be understood by women in a different way. And they express that inner need in different ways.

When I was able to truly understand where my second husband was coming from, and why he did what he did, I found that to a much greater extent I had absorbed into myself a balance of yang consciousness.

But when I was simply insisting that he was wrong because he wasn't like me, and he, because he was strong in himself, would insist that he wasn't about to become like me, then we would have an impasse, and something would have to change before we could find a healthy balance that served us both. Because, let's face it, he wasn't born to be a woman.

In the next articles, I'll say more about the longing for happiness and freedom in our relationships, and how can satisfy that longing by expanding our awareness to include the qualities that will balance us in ourselves.

Part 3: Balancing our Energies –  
Yin and Yang

I no longer give relationships workshops or relationships counseling, because my spiritual calling now lies in a different direction. But at one time, about twenty years ago, I found lots of people coming to me for counseling in this area. And a remarkable thing is that all of the women wanted the man to change, as they put it, “just a little bit.”

They didn’t want him to change radically, but they wanted him to change a little.

I remember how, at the time, I was hammering on my husband to change just a little – to be a little more expressive, a little more attentive, a little more careful in the way he spoke. And it seemed so little to ask.

But I finally figured out that what I was asking had to do with the difference between how men and women are made.

We’re a great deal alike. We’re part of the same species, and we aren’t all that different. But there’s a little bit of a different orientation, and I kept wanting my husband to shift his orientation and become a little bit

more like me. And he instinctively pulled back, as most men would, wisely or not. It depends on how self-integrated they are, and he was very self-integrated, and he wisely recognized that he wasn't born to do that.

A great part of what I admired in him was a certain reticence about, and resistance to the kinds of issues that women can spend a great deal of their time endlessly pondering. You can wrap it all up and label it: "*What is me?*"

He would look at it, and he didn't find it attractive. It was fine for me to ponder, but trying to drag him into my world was a waste of energy.

And yet I wasn't entirely wrong. And when I stopped hammering and started giving him space to walk into without nagging him all the time, I found that it worked better, and I got what I wanted.

His refusal to play my game was extremely good for me, because if he had capitulated to my little demands, we'd be wallowing in a strictly yin part of our relationship, with a very real risk that it would be destroyed. I hated it when he resisted me, and I hated it when he said I wasn't right. But over the long haul, I can look back and realize that there was some truth in it.

The fundamental purpose of a relationship is to expand your consciousness so that you can experience the complementary nature of female and male energies and integrate it in yourself.

There's absolutely no reason you have to be married to do that. You don't have to marry at all, but if you want to be truly happy, and if it's the only way you're going to be able to learn, you may have to do it.

If you're ever going to be truly happy, you have to learn to access the kind of energy that will help you find a balance inside yourself, so that you can expand your awareness to include the opposite side of you, and honor that energy in others.

That's really what our relationships are about. Life is asking us to expand our awareness on the spectrum of yin and yang. And even if ours is a very female nature and lifestyle, there's an inner strength that life demands we develop from within that yin lifestyle, even if means just having the discipline to be very yin and have integrity in that way of living.

People sometimes ask me if I think men and women really need one another.



They used to need each other a lot more. Men basically needed to marry because it was expected of them. If you didn't marry, it was difficult for your career. One of the first questions you would be asked in a job interview was if you were married, because it was considered an indication of a man's stability and character and values.

If a man wanted a good job and the stability and support of a family, marriage was the only clear and obvious path. And it was obvious that if a woman wanted children, she would have to get married.

And you had to marry for sex. That's being blunt, but it's a large part of what drives us together. And now that the world has shifted, and we've become more focused on the quality of energy that we'll allow into our lives, we've more or less taken marriage out of the picture. But there's still this question: "What's going to drive us together now?"

A lot of the emptiness and doubts that people are feeling about their intimate relationships are due to the fact that we now need to find good reasons to be together.

Women created an interesting new reality when they dove headlong into the sexual revolution. It's basically that they lost their trading card. That may seem like an overly crude and old-fashioned way to put it, but it's a simple fact. And now that we're living with the consequences, we have to see the new reality for what it is.

I don't mean to define men as animals, because it's not true. But sex is a very powerful drive for men and women both, and it causes us to do things that, if we had no sexual drive, we wouldn't do.

There wouldn't be anything that pushes us together in the same way. And then that push causes you to discover all sorts of other realities, including the desire to make the relationship work on many levels, including, if you're so inclined, the need to make a home.

Another way the revolution in sexual morality has changed our relationships is that sex now enters the picture long before we've really gotten to know each other.

It's almost a given that one of the first things we do is have a sexual relationship. It's very common, and it's difficult to avoid. But I think it would be a great help if we could be patient and consign sex more to the realm of future expectancy.

I'm perfectly aware how difficult it is. But the problem is that jumping into an intimate relationship causes you to imagine that you've got a lot more in common than you actually have. You've released a magnetism that creates a tremendous sense of integration. And it may not have much more than a physical and emotional component.

Then people wake up and get upset because, you know, "He doesn't trust me. He doesn't open up to me. He's not really committed to me."

And I wonder, "Why should he? What have you done together besides have sex?"

Women fail to appreciate what a trap it represents for a man to contemplate the idea of being wholly committed to a woman. I'm not talking about being committed to making babies and earning money, and working for years to support a family. But men are keenly aware that women are very demanding and that they push the envelope a lot.

The reason it's a stock image is because it's true. Women are in the lead in this - let's face it, the feminine is the touchy-feely side of the yin/yang circle. It's always touching and feeling and wanting to know what's going on inside themselves and inside their partner. Meanwhile, men are in a charging-forward mode. So it has to come from

the feminine side to push to find a balance in the realm of feelings. That's why we have each other. And men can teach women to think about more than the moment, and to consider the longer results.

My husband said, "You know, everything's just fine, and then you get upset."

I was stunned. "How dare you say that? Of course everything wasn't fine. That's why I got upset."

But when I calmed down, I saw that there was a lot of truth in it. I would overreact to something very small, and once I had overreacted, I had committed to create a big experience out of it. Whereas if I hadn't overreacted, and if I'd taken it more calmly, everything really was fine. There was no crisis until my reaction created one.

And with all due respect, women, that's very tiresome to a man. It's tiring because he's going along, feeling that things are okay, and then she's suddenly flying up and down, which takes a tremendous amount of energy to absorb and fairly deal with, when he has a lot to do just being a man in the world.

And then there's the opposite side of the coin, where the man wants her to be there when he wants her, but he doesn't really care what's important to her.

Coming back to this business of new kinds of relationships, and people's unrealistic expectations, I ask people, "What have you done to earn a commitment?"

What have you done to earn that person's trust? How have you shown this person that you'll be worth the time and energy that you want them to invest in you?"

And from the woman's side, we have to remember the many compromises a woman has to make in order to live harmoniously with a man.

There's an inevitable thing that happens, where the male energy sort of takes over the feminine energy. We can talk about it as much as we like, but when push comes to shove, that's how it works. And before we can deal with it to the benefit of both parties, we have to look at it objectively and understand what's happening.

When a woman takes up a relationship with a man, she has to adjust to his reality, and it has to be worth it to her. She has to make sure he's going to give more to her life than he'll take. And the man has to put up with this endless roller coaster, of her reacting to his nature and constantly hammering him, "Why aren't you doing it differently?"

The female nag is such a stereotype. I can see it in myself, and I'm stunned sometimes by the things I can say or do. I'm horrified by it. So we absolutely have to make it worthwhile to each other. We have to become such a valuable part of one another's life that the effort is worth it.

What we have to learn, and it's a very big lesson, is to behave appropriately. And it's something that I believe is an absolute key in our relationships - to learn to behave appropriately.

In order to behave appropriately, we have to be very objective about ourselves and the people around us. We have to understand what is a righteous request. And a righteous request will include me as well as you.

The number one question is: "Is this a fair thing to ask of you?" And the second question is: "Is this something I can promise with integrity, and something I really should do?"

I believe nearly all the problems in relationships come from a lack of self-knowledge, a lack of understanding of who I am and what I truly need, what my genuine limits are, and what my values are.

The success that I had in my second marriage was one hundred percent due to the fact that in the ten years when I wasn't married, I became very, very clear about what was important to me.

When you're clear about what's important to you, you won't be tempted to get engaged in situations that will take it away from you.

What's important to each of us will vary a great deal, and it isn't always obvious.

Let me be specific, even though it won't necessarily be helpful for everyone who hears this. But I think it will give you an idea of how I ran through this, and maybe you'll find some insights in it for yourself.

There were many, many things that, given my nature and personality, you might think I would want in a partner. And, interestingly, I had a lot of the obvious things in the first man I married.

He was very verbal and clever and witty - all of which are things that I just love. I enjoy verbal conversations immensely. And then there was the second man I married, who was very quiet. He didn't talk much, and he wasn't witty. He didn't have the appreciation of witty repartee that I love. He didn't understand a lot of

my jokes, because he was just not on that wavelength. He had a wonderful sense of humor, but if I was doing some tricky little wordplay, he was sort of standing there looking at me.

With many of the people in my life, including men that I've known and appreciated over the years, it was that witty mental and verbal energy that I enjoyed tremendously, and you'd think it would be important to me in a relationship. But in the years when I wasn't married and didn't planned to be, because I was a nun at Ananda Village, I really got down to understanding the bottom-line issues that mattered to me.

And because my life is about Ananda and spiritual things, it came down to sharing a certain understanding of the spiritual path, and having a certain equal energy for it, and an equal zeal for it.

It couldn't just be a supportive attitude in him that didn't match my energy and my deep commitment, because my energy for the spiritual path was total. And he needed to demonstrate an absolute willingness not to interfere with me on that level, no matter what. And after I made sure of that, I realized that I could live with the other stuff. But I could never live without that.



When I met my second husband, I had no intention of marrying him or anyone, and it took a year and a half for the relationship to develop. One of the things that happened during that period was that I realized that when it came to my bottom-line criteria, he was right there with me.

I had never felt that I would meet anyone like that, because I am fierce. I'm so fierce in my determination that, in fairness, I really thought I should never marry. Because if anybody crosses me on those issues, I'll eat them alive. So I didn't think there would be anybody who wouldn't cross that line with me, and I didn't think it was fair to be in a relationship with someone who couldn't meet me on that level, because I would be utterly uncompromising. But, you see, I absolutely knew that about myself, and I knew it so deeply that I was never tempted to break that resolve. But it was a hard-fought battle.

It sounds simple when I describe it from a distance in time. In my first marriage, we had tremendous compatibility on many levels, but on the fundamental issue of my zeal for selflessness as the core principle of spirituality, it fell apart.

And when it fell apart, I found that I was furious with him. Maybe it was because I had suppressed this or that element in myself in order to be with him. But as I allowed my anger to percolate, I realized that I was furious for about seven specific things that had happened during our five years together.

And why did I pick those particular incidents? In every case, I realized that an important principle was at stake - a principle that was fundamental to who I felt myself to be; a deeply moral principle. And I had violated it, but I thought that he had made me violate it, so I was mad at him.

In time, I realized that he hadn't made me violate it at all. I had given up my power to decide. And I gave it up because I didn't want to stand up for it, perhaps out of fear of what it would do to the relationship. I didn't have the courage to accept the consequences of standing up for it.

When I didn't stand up for what I believed in, I felt that I had disappeared as a person. And the day I realized it, I was no longer mad at him; instead, I was furious with myself. Because he hadn't known that any big principles were at stake. He had acted honorably according to his

understanding. And I was the one who'd known better and hadn't behaved well. And that, to me, is a level where you can't go, or you really will lose the relationship. The relationship can't be saved if you compromise your soul.

But I must admit, you can compromise a lot on just about everything else. You can compromise on your taste in furniture, and where you'll live, and where you'll go on vacation - but you can't compromise your core values, and you can never be with someone who asks you to do that.

Now, I don't mean that there isn't a grace period where you can give people a chance to learn what your values are. But it all has to be put on the table and looked at.

So when I talk about behaving appropriately, I think you need to consider that you'll have to give way quite a lot in a relationship, and there's no alternative.

There's an image that I find useful when I think about marriage - it's two fried eggs in a pan. When you put the eggs in the pan, you don't want the yolks to break, but it's okay if the whites blend.

Similarly, you can't let your integrity be violated in a relationship, but there's a large area where you can blend your edges with the other person's.

I was very happily married for a long time. But in principle I'm not sure that marriage is a good thing for everybody. When you marry, there's a mushing-together of your auras, and you accept a bit of the other person's karma and magnetism into yourself, and you don't have your own complete integrity anymore. And you've got to have enough inner strength to ride through it with your core intact. That's why the scriptures don't tell us that we absolutely have to have a relationship.

The magnetism in a relationship tends to flow from the man to the woman. It's expressed in the way our bodies are made. It's the way sex happens, and sex accomplishes a lot of the mushing-together of our auras and magnetism.

But there's a line that you must draw, starting before there's a sexual relationship and continuing after. You need to think how you'll keep your integrity after there's been such a major transfer of magnetism and an integration of your auras. And women are especially aware of the transfer.

Swami Kriyananda confirmed that a man's energy comes into the woman. It's self-evident physiologically. But what's not so obvious is that a man's aura overtakes a

woman's aura, and Swami said that it infiltrates her subconscious. When a woman has a sexual relationship, his energy becomes part of you.

It doesn't happen the same way for men. That's why men's energy in sex is very different. They aren't as completely taken over, so they can be more impersonal about it. It's why when a woman gets mad at a man, the first thing she does is throw him out of her bed.

I know that some people draw strong connections between sex and spirituality. But I don't. I'm just saying that psychologically and energetically, a huge amount of energy gets released in sexual union.

It partly depends on how yin the woman is. And some women are so yang in their nature that they have a more male energy toward sex. But for most women, a trace of the man remains with her. And if it's an ongoing sexual relationship, she becomes somewhat defined by him.

It might not be true for every woman, but I think it's true for most. And if you try to fight it too much, you risk creating some strange feelings and some strange disturbances in the magnetic exchange between you.

Once you've engaged sexually and blended your auras, you're much more connected and engaged. And you can't

have it both ways. So you have to make sure it's the right direction for you.

And this is the real basis for the wisdom of sexual restraint and sexual abstinence or celibacy: to wait until you're sure of the energy. Because once the woman, especially, takes the man's energy into her, she becomes in some way part of him. And it takes a while to extricate yourself from that.

That's why as soon as she gets mad, she sends him out of her bed. And men don't necessarily feel that way, because sex for the man is more impersonally defined; it's less about absorbing the woman's energy, and more a sort of way of breaking the barrier to getting closer to her as an image of the yin quality that he longs to experience and integrate in himself.

But for the woman, she carries him around in her. So you have to make sure it's an energy that you want, and an energy you can live with, because you'll have it with you all the time, and it's what you'll have to live with.

I'm perfectly enthusiastic about a lifelong single life. I think it isn't a bad idea at all. Sometimes I've suggested it to people. It isn't necessarily appropriate for everyone, but I've said, "Just have a romance once in a while. Or if you

like him a little bit, have a lifelong romance, but don't twist your lives up too much."

These are viable options that we can choose these days. But you need to know your capacity to handle the kind of relationship you think you want to be in. And you need to know who you're getting involved with, and go slowly and carefully.

Here's an example of the wisdom of moving cautiously. You need to consider that people have good years and bad years. You may catch them in a nice astrological cycle, and then wake up and realize it's just a temporary respite, and they've got terrible issues that they've gone back into and are struggling with.

These cycles can last years, so you can't always test this in the short run. But if you catch your partner in a good year, or a year that isn't typical of their life pattern, you may find a new kind of energy suddenly entering the picture that you didn't know was there.

The main thing is to know yourself, and the limits of your willingness to give and become part of the other person.

Part 4: The Perfect Partner –  
Jesus Christ or Someone Like Us?

In my first marriage, as I've mentioned, I imagined that I could sacrifice everything for the sake of the relationship. I managed to do it for several years. But when we came to Ananda, I found something that was far more important to me than the relationship. And that's when it fell apart.

As I've also mentioned, you really need to decide how much you're willing to sacrifice for a relationship. You always need to be aware of the delicate balance between what you can ask for, and what people can ask of you, and what you can realistically promise.

I've never liked housework. In my second marriage, I was able to avoid cleaning the house because we had a lovely family that came and cleaned, and my husband was also a wonderful housekeeper, a fact for which I blessed his mother every day. He was incredibly meticulous and neat and organized – long before it would occur to me that the house needed cleaning, he would already be doing something about it.



He was very physically energetic. Not long before we moved in together, I said, “You know, I don’t clean houses – that’s just the way it is, and I would rather do everything else.”

So we worked it out that I would take care of the food and clothes, and he would care for the physical home.

For many years, he did the housework beautifully and without complaining. Then, when we were living in a little house at Ananda Village, he very appropriately, and at just the right moment, and just the right tone of voice, asked me one day if I would wash the bathtub on a regular basis.

I guess he just didn’t like the job. I’m very myopic, and I couldn’t spot that the bathtub wasn’t crystal-clean. So I had to go in there with my glasses on and roll up my sleeves and scrub the tub.

It was a perfectly righteous request, but I hated it. And it became for me, like everything else, a metaphor for the reality of our life together, and how we’re always having to decide where to draw the line.

In my first marriage, my husband asked things of me that were inappropriate because they compromised my core

ideals. And as a result I found myself making promises that I didn't have the will to keep. So when my second husband asked me to clean the bathroom, wanting to be perfectly honest, I had to respond, "Maybe."

Perhaps I should have said, "Yes, sure, of course!" But I didn't know that I could say it and mean it.

And then, what tends to happen when you make promises "in the name of the relationship?" You find you don't have the inner wherewithal to keep your promises, and then everybody feels betrayed. Or you end up having to tell them that it wasn't a fair request after all.

Of course, it would be far better if you could be perfectly clear at the start: "If I do that for you, I'll be sacrificing something that I'm not willing or generous enough to sacrifice."

Much better to fight it out on the turf where the issue exists, rather than make a series of unrealistic promises and just end up fighting about these questions of self-betrayal later on.

I believe it all comes down to the differences between the female and male yin and yang energies.

The yin female energy is receptive, and the male yang energy is active, outward, and goal-oriented.

I realize it isn't a perfect analogy, but football and war are defining yang activities. And in football and war, you don't spend a lot of time thinking about how you feel - whether you like the way it's going. You train yourself to do what's needed, without regard for yourself or your feelings. And there are many situations in life, quite apart from war and football, where it's a very, very positive thing. Because the essence of kindness and compassion and the capacity to understand a greater reality than your own is self-restraint. And women who develop their yang energy are the better off for it, when they can use it in those expansive ways.

The yang way of coping is to bite the bullet and keep moving forward. It isn't necessarily that the male is not in touch with how he's feeling. He may be very much in touch, but he deals with life primarily through action, according to his own best lights. And he's very likely to subordinate yin considerations and give them lower priority: "Fine, I'm in touch, now let's move ahead."

I remember scheduling a reading with a Vedic astrologer for my second husband, and it was very interesting. It gave the usual advice that you might expect - "You'll have this and that good period, and then you'll have that bad difficult period." But when we walked out,

he smiled, and without any aspersions on the astrologer, he said, "Let's not spend money on this anymore."

He said, "What difference does it make?" As if to say, these things will happen whether we've had a reading about them or not, so why spend the money?

That's the yang point of view in a nutshell. "I'm not going to give less than a hundred percent just because I know it's this or that phase of the planets. I get up every day and put out the best energy I can. And I don't really care if it's a good day or a bad day."

I care intensely if it's a good or bad day, because I'm very yin. But he would say, "So what?" And there's a lot that we could learn from each other.

Of course, there are times when yang energy isn't so helpful, because it does have its limitations.

Yang is more physiological and sexual. Also, human beings are constituted to mate for life, and yang can become impatient with that, as the inevitable issues start to arise. But when you don't mate for life, I feel that you pay a price that comes out of every cell of your being. Every single cell gets slightly mutilated, and it has to be reconstructed with strength and determination. And yang energy is aware of that. Men can often cope with a

breakup without experiencing a long healing process, because they have inner resources that are geared toward moving on.

(Question about bad choices.)

Asha: Every bad choice you've made was because you had a false idea of what you needed, and what you liked, and what was appropriate for you.

Self-knowledge requires tremendous humility. You have to find a way to be sufficiently dispassionate to create a space where you aren't insisting on getting your own way, so that you can allow true wisdom to enter the discussion as a very real option.

A woman friend of mine who's happily married, but wasn't married for a very long time, read that if you want a mate, you should make a list of all the qualities you'd like your partner to have.

She wrote about seven pages of the qualities she wanted in a mate, and the list somehow made its way into Swami Kriyananda's hands.

When he finished reading, he turned to her and said, gently but firmly, "My dear, you want Jesus Christ for a husband!"

He looked at her, as if to say, “I hate to be the one to break it to you, honey...” And then he said, “And Jesus would *not* marry you!”

He said, “You need someone who’s more on your own level.”

You need to be sufficiently grounded to be able to figure out what you consider truly important. I don’t mean that you should settle for less than the ideal, but in real life we usually get someone who reflects our own nature, regardless of our imagined image of perfection, regardless of whether we’re actually trying to attract that “lesser” mate.

When my second husband and I were preparing to be married, Swamiji made a comment about something in his nature that he felt could be more balanced. And then he said, “But, of course, that’s pretty much what you’re like, too.”

And it helped me, because it gave me a clear insight about what I was like, and what I would have to deal with in the marriage.

The point is, we’re drawn to our partners because of our failings as well as our strengths. And we need to honestly and calmly accept that this might not be the

perfect mate, but Jesus Christ wouldn't marry us, because he would want someone more on his level. And he wouldn't be attracted to just anybody.

I don't mean to be flippant or sacrilegious, but if you want someone who's better than you, the best option is to become better yourself. Otherwise, you'll get someone who's pretty much the way you are.

I remember a woman who got into an awful relationship with an awful man. And, with all due respect, she was no prize, either, but she wanted to break off the relationship because they were tormenting each other. And she had the terrible thought, "Maybe he's the one that God intended for me."

She went to Swami and said, "It's a terrible relationship. We hate each other. But is he 'the one'?" And Swamiji said, very gently and directly, "My dear, you have so many lessons to learn, and you could learn them with quite a few different people."

He said, "You have to be very, very advanced before you have so little karma left that 'the right one' is that specific."

I don't mean that there isn't a single, exclusive, grand love of all the ages who's just waiting to meet you, and

that we can aspire to. I think that these powerful destinies do exist, and I believe it sometimes works out that way.

But we need to learn our lessons at the level we are living on, and we may need to learn them by being attracted to a person that we can't stand. Or we may learn them in harmonious ways.

Many people find themselves essentially attracted to the same person over and over. Sometimes, it's literally the same person, and maybe you'll get a better model as you grow in yourself. Or you might get a person who's slightly better. And sometimes you'll go down a level for a while until it's so bad that you wake up and start working harder on yourself.

When you find yourself in the same unbearable situation for the umpteenth time, you begin to wonder where it's coming from. And then you're motivated to get to work and learn your lessons and find a way to change and get away from the suffering.

Life sends us the teachers we need. Sometimes they may teach us through a relationship that ends up working beautifully. And I think that's the best kind of teaching. But sometimes they're serving as a mirror for qualities in



us that we may find it very painful to face, and that we can only grow out of by working to change them.

Your partner exposes your nature, but he doesn't create your nature, and that's an important distinction, because you need to be very clear that it isn't the person holding the mirror who needs to change. It's you.

My first husband was very exacting, and he was very meticulous around the house, so I had that quality in my relationships twice, and I'm not sure why.

My second husband and I first lived together in an A-frame cabin with a little wood stove. Every so often, we would buy a newspaper, and we would store the old newspapers in a box under the stairs, to help us light the wood stove.

One day, I tossed the papers carelessly in the box where they landed half-in and half-out, and I could feel him notice my carelessness, but he didn't say anything.

My first husband had been so onto me about every little thing, and it drove me crazy when I found my second husband doing it. I was on him like a wild animal. I said, "Don't you ever do that to me!!!" And he was amazed, because it had absolutely nothing to do with him; it was all about me and my first marriage.

I said defiantly, "It's in the box!" But I had to recognize that he hadn't done anything worth getting so upset about. He was just exposing my extraordinary sensitivity to being picked on for the little things that didn't matter.

That's what he meant when he said, "Everything is fine, and then you get upset." There was hardly any energy behind his irritation that I hadn't put the papers neatly in the box.

I used to tease him about it - how exhausted he must be, having to go shut all the kitchen drawers and cabinets - how wearing it must, year after year, because he couldn't figure out why the heck I didn't close the damn drawers. And it's a fact that after I was done in the kitchen all the drawers would be sticking out a half-inch.

To his credit, he would talk about it occasionally, but he realized that it usually wasn't worth it. And I learned that it would cost me nothing to put the newspapers neatly in the box.

There are many things that make us react even though we don't remember the original cause. To make it worse, it may have started in a former life, so we don't have a clue where it's coming from. But it sets up a

pattern that creates a certain fear of being dominated, or pushed around, or humiliated, or whatever it is.

There seems to be a law of life that we're attracted to the people who are related to the fears inside us. And this is why we're together: to learn to balance these things so that we can heal ourselves and become free.

You have a hidden memory inside that corresponds to a vibration in the other person. And then they're standing there innocently, and they'll do or say or think something that prods you to learn to be more balanced and self-contained.

A woman friend of mine who's a psychologist put it very aptly. She said, "You need to learn where your pain is coming from."

I knew a couple who had a very brief marriage, because he had had difficult experiences and was consumed by his memories. He didn't have a clue about how to deal with them, or the courage to try to understand them. And as a result, every time she did certain trivial things, it would push his buttons, and he would think she was deliberately trying to hurt him.

He thought she wasn't trying hard enough to understand what he needed her to be like. And everything she was doing was perfectly innocent.

Let's face it, nobody is going to memorize the map of your psyche and be so aware and sensitive and self-controlled that they'll never accidentally upset you. It's unrealistic it to expect it to be otherwise.

Other people are just as messed up as we are. And we're all stumbling along together doing the best we know how.

No matter how sincere they are, no matter how much they love you, no matter how good they are, no matter how dedicated they are, they are not perfect. They'll do their best, but their best is going to hurt you, maybe even profoundly, because they can't help it, any more than you can help yourself.

So we need to learn to have a certain calm expectation, without judging them. Of course, it has to be within humane boundaries, because there definitely are abusive relationships.

But I'm talking about a cycle that isn't abusive, but where you're working with two energies that are never going to be a single energy.

They're always going to be two energies. And the fun of it, and the satisfaction, if you're both committed, courageous, and willing, comes from learning to help each other, and to have the patience and detachment to let it run its course.

In India, they honor the love that a mother gives to her child as the highest and most ideal form of feminine love. In America, sexual love is the ideal. Here, it's not the wife or mother who's the ideal, it's the sexy lover.

All of our images of women are about sex. And it's telling an entirely different story. I believe that when you understand a mother's love very deeply, it's not only a much more realistic ideal, but also a more practical one.

Whenever I suggest this to women, I hardly ever get an enthusiastic response. And I don't get a positive response from men.

The validity of the mother ideal struck me very profoundly during a counseling session with a couple, where the wife was being brutal to the man, criticizing him endlessly and unmercifully.

And it's true, she had a lot of yang energy, and she was frustrated that he wasn't more yang. And as a way to get him to be more yang, she was constantly challenging

his self-esteem, to the point where she was destroying it. They were fine people, but she thought that if she just kept telling him what was wrong with him, he would change.

After the session, I took him aside and said, "You've got to get away from that woman as soon as you can."

I liked the woman. She was a person I cared for. But I told him that he had to get away from her, because she was killing him, and they had children, and it was deeply affecting them to see him treated that way, and to see their mother treat him that way.

I spoke to her afterwards. She had two sons, and I said, "Would you speak your sons the way you speak to him?"

She said, "No." And I said, "Why?" She said, "Because it wouldn't help him. When you have a son, your first thought is that my job is to help this person get through whatever they have to go through."

The ideal mother and father restrain their own desires in order to give the child the love and encouragement that will help build up their energy because they love them. And the ideal result is that the child becomes strong and grateful.

You don't do it for the child's gratitude, but as the child gets strong, he is grateful to the mother, when he's old enough and sufficiently wise to understand what she has done for him.

When I asked her if she would speak that way to her sons, she said, "No, I never would!"

I said, "What do you think the effect is on your husband? Do you think a man is fundamentally different than a boy? Or a woman is fundamentally different from a girl? We're human beings."

Mother love is not the ideal of sexless self-sacrifice. It's the ideal of having a conscious willingness to do what's helpful, and not just do whatever I feel like.

The mother who gives too much doesn't help the child, either. So we need to understand that a mother's love is not just about self-sacrifice.

In fact, the self-sacrificing mother is someone the child desperately wants to get away from. The child instinctively knows that this person isn't doing it for the child; she's trying to live her life through the child, and it leaves the child with a horribly suffocating feeling that they want desperately to run away from.

I frankly believe that mother love, for women and men equally, is the key to a happy relationship. Because there's a tremendous amount of non-expectation in it. "I'm doing this because it's right, and because it gives me joy to expand my heart in this way to serve you."

Ask yourself, "What's the most appropriate thing for me to do?"

My first husband and I talked about this often. At the time, submitting my will to his was very good for me, because I was so disappointed in the end, and I learned a lot from the experience.

But it was very bad for him, because it took him years to figure out that it wasn't what he could, or should, reasonably expect from a woman.

He had gotten the idea that it was how women should be, always yielding and compliant. And it took him years to realize that I had created a false picture of reality for him, and that his happiness didn't depend on finding a compliant partner.

If a mother spoils her child, the child will never be able to have a life of his own, because he'll always be looking for his mother, in very wrong ways.



I believe the art of relationships is about exploring what's going on between you, and what happened and why, and then always looking for the right balance that will enable you to be free and giving.

Our interactions are important because they help us understand what's going on. They give us feedback so that we can talk it through and find the right balance of give-and-take that's based on a clear understanding.

There has to be a personal willingness to take responsibility for our own happiness. And there has to be lots of involvement with each other, or else there's no relationship at all. You may get very good at being independent and not having to depend on anyone, but then you won't have a relationship.

Part 5: Joy Loves Company –  
Finding Happiness Together

My second husband and I married after a period when I had been extremely happy as a single person and a nun for a very long time – almost ten years.

After we were married, I remember a day when I managed to create a deep unhappiness in myself without any proximate cause.

I was sitting on the couch, and he was going about his life, and I gradually got myself really upset, and then the pot came to a boil, and it was all the things that females can do in their minds to get worked up about their feelings.

“If he really loved me, he would ask me what’s wrong with me.”

At the end of which, I realized how vulnerable you become when you let yourself get closely involved with another person. And, having had almost a decade of total freedom, I was horrified by that level of vulnerability.

I was horrified at the prospect of spending year after year this way, in a self-created cycle of feeling badly used.

There had been absolutely no inciting cause on David's side; I had simply done it all by myself, and I realized that the possibilities for self-created suffering are literally endless.

I tried to think of alternatives. And the first and most obvious thing that came to my mind was to build a hard shell around my heart.

As it happened, we were painting wood furniture with a clear plastic finish. We had put enough of the coating on the tables that they could resist the weather, but you could still see the wood. And I had a mental image of painting a hard plastic layer over my heart, and then when I'm old and gray I'll look exactly the same, but there will be a thicker crust.

And then I realized it was still the early years of our relationship, and if I did this every time something hurt my feelings, for reasons real or imaginary, it would build up into the kind of happily abused feeling you can often see in older women, which is completely self-generated and self-enclosed, and not at all attractive.

I realized that reacting to my life by putting up a shield around my heart would absolutely keep me from

engaging. And I like to engage, so I didn't welcome the idea.

And then I tried to reason, "He's a good man. I can trust him." And I went through all of the things I could trust and admire about him, all of which were true, because I wouldn't have gotten engaged to him otherwise.

But then I had to stop and consider that we can never predict what might happen.

You cannot know that something astonishing will not happen - some catastrophic illness, or a hopeless attraction to someone else. Not that I would leap into it, but you can never foresee the tests that are coming your way.

I thought, "I can't be safe by pretending he's never going to hurt my feelings."

I don't mean to dwell on life's horrors, but people do have accidents, and they get brain damage, and then they become somebody else. And people suddenly discover that they have a penchant for addiction.

So, I thought, you can't let yourself feel safe because you imagine he won't ever hurt you. Because then you'll feel betrayed if he accidentally does. And you don't know what may come out of you that will disappoint or hurt him.

So I had to think of how I could reconcile this very realistic view of our life together, and go forward with a positive feeling about the relationship. And I realized that the one thing I absolutely trusted was God. I completely trusted that God would give me what I needed – not always what I wanted, but what I truly needed. And if I’m open to life with full faith that the right experiences will come my way, I know that they will lead me where I want to go. And then the next question becomes, “Where am I trying to go?”

Am I trying to spin a cocoon where I can curl up and be safe and have my own little life, and then I’ll be happy? Or am I trying to attain inner freedom?

I’m not talking about a false freedom that’s built out of a hard-shelled personal detachment from other people’s hurtful actions, but a freedom from the things in myself that keep me feeling hurt – and the freedom to soar in a consciousness where I’m unshakably happy and not suffering.

I talked earlier about yin and yang, and how we need to have access to both sides of ourselves, female and male, so that whatever comes, you can draw on the kind of energy that you need. Where you’ll be a mature, balance

person who can be strong when it's appropriate, and sensitive and caring when it's called for.

What keeps us from finding that balance? I think it's ourselves. I can count at least ten occasions in the past week alone when I've thought, "I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I have the energy. I don't know if I have the creativity. I don't know if I have the insights."

These feelings of limitation come, and you press on and train yourself to find the energy and courage and creativity to do it regardless. I feel that I can do many things now that I couldn't do ten years ago, simply because I've had to do them, and I haven't given up.

My life has brought challenges, many of which I've resented with all my heart and soul. But it's brought me the experiences that I needed to become strong, and I've learned and grown through them, so that whenever those same things come now, it's not a problem.

I trust God and I trust life, that it will bring me the experiences I need. And I want to stay open to those experiences.

If a relationship comes into my life, I want to be open to its potentials, not because of the person I'm with, but because of what might happen through that person.

And through all the years of my relationships, in my two marriages and with the many people I've been close to at Ananda, the balance that I've striven for is to keep those two realities, yin and yang, male and female, clearly and openly in place.

Every time a relationship has gotten a little out of whack, I found that I could look within myself and check the balance. Because a long time ago I realized that I'd gotten it into my head that my second husband needed to be a certain way, or else I would be unhappy. And, of course, he would inevitably fail to live up to my microscopic expectations.

But then I learned that if I looked at the bigger picture, I could see that he had been honorable and fair. But those feelings do insisting on creeping in - why did he say this, why didn't he say that? Why does he want this, why doesn't he want that? And you can rag the thing to pieces and drive yourself crazy over them.

If you're married to an abusive alcoholic, that's one thing. But I'm talking about high-quality human beings. And I realized that I had created a habit of deciding that when so-and-so didn't do x, y, or z, it was a license to be unhappy, and then I would get on their case, and then

they would get upset, and we would go hurtling down a spiral that might never end, once I started sending my energy in that direction.

So I began to ask myself a question that has been extremely useful to me: “If I had to live with this quality in the person I’m dealing with, or in myself, for the rest of my life, is there enough good in the relationship to make it worthwhile?”

And I started wrapping it in terms of a simple question: “Is this a relationship-buster?”

We can talk about this or that aspect of the relationship that you absolutely can’t stand. And, yes indeed, those things are true. But if you think that you can make the person change, much less make them perfect, you’re wrong.

Most of the time, when a woman hammers at a man, it’s absolutely guaranteed that he won’t change. He won’t, because generally speaking, she’s wrong. Or even if she’s right, he isn’t going to learn it from her by being angrily pounded.

He can’t, because once he allows that process to begin, there’s no end. The male yang in him says: “If I let her start nagging me, I’ll become the image of a hen-



pecked husband, and that is definitely not something I want.”

An interesting thing happens between men and women when they start a relationship. The very thing you love about them is what begins to drive you crazy. The things you're attracted to, and that cause the relationship to start, are the things that drive you nuts later on.

One of the things I loved about my second husband was that he was energetic, honorable, responsible, and determined in his work.

And then sometimes I just had to say, “Can't you *stop* working? Can't you *ever* put me first?”

I actually said those words to him twenty years ago. I said, “I don't think I can be married to you, because you've never once gone in late to the office, just to be with me.”

It just came out of my mouth, and I thought, “Where did those words come from?” It was the very thing I liked most about him, his deep impersonal sense of responsibility, that was bothering me so much.

What he always liked about me is that I'm a little bit daft, and even though I'm very grounded, I can also way out there. I remember how we were trying to make a

decision, and I wasn't up for it. I could feel his complete impatience, and I finally looked at him and said, "You used to find this charming."

He smiled, because it was true. He used to like it about me, that I was on cloud nine a lot of the time. And then he was grounded, and really, that was what we would fight about.

Often, what women are trying to take away from the man is something that's fundamental to the man's nature. Men have a lot of common sense, and they may know that you aren't right, or that it's not the right time.

My second husband and I had a huge fight about some issue or other because I really wanted him to be different. And when I asked him if he thought it would be a good idea for him to be that way, he said, "Yes, but it's not a priority."

Meaning, "Right now I don't have the inspiration that's telling me I can deal with this. And it's you, with your discomfort, who are trying to impose it on me against my will."

A mother wouldn't do that to her child. Imagine what it would do to the child's self-esteem, if you were continually pushing him around all the time.

When we begin to get it into our head that everything would be just perfect if only he would be a little bit different in these certain ways, we make the relationship so unpleasant that it becomes utterly empty of any good feelings.

And then you have to ask yourself, if he or she remains like this the rest of our lives together, will there be anything left that's worthwhile?

If this person wants to move to Kalamazoo and there isn't an Ananda center there, and the Ananda church is the center of my life, then I will absolutely have to say no, because it's a relationship-buster.

But if he's never going to ask you about your day, in just the right tone of voice, and listen sensitively just the way you want him to, can you live with that for the rest of your life?

Can I live with the fact that I'll always have to go and talk to my girlfriend, because my husband or partner doesn't care?

When I first began asking these questions, the answers were often different than they are now. And so you always have to be looking at how I feel at this moment, and what I need to say.

I'm psychologically very healthy - I don't need to learn to "speak up," or get in touch with my feelings. There are many things I don't need, because I've worked on them. So these are appropriate questions for me, but the right questions may be completely different for you. But the basic question is this: what's your bottom line? And it may be very different from mine or someone else's.

If I'm willing to live with a quirk in the other person's nature, I shouldn't indulge my personal need to hassle them about it. Because the chances of getting them to change by hassling them are absolutely non-existent.

Now, that isn't the same as wanting to talk it over, at the right time, in the right way, when you're ready to learn something about yourself. But if they feel you're just trying to get them to change because you want to meddle in their aura and make it different, then it's never going to work.

That kind of "change" isn't worth trying to achieve, because the results are always destined to be zilch. At the same time, it's important not to try to suppress your desire for them to change. You can't simply suppress your discontent, because that doesn't work, either.

With suppression, you just end up erupting later on, and at that point you're wildly out of control. If you're suppressing, it will come out in unhealthy ways. You've got seven years of irritation piled up in the secret corners of your heart, and you think you're arguing about the soup, but you find yourself becoming enraged, and for sure you aren't talking about the soup - you're talking about something you probably aren't even aware of and can't remember.

You can't enter a relationship to teach the other person, on either side. Swami Kriyananda said, "Marriage is much too close a relationship for anybody to be the other's teacher."

He said, "Even when the person asks for advice, treat the request very, very carefully."

That's been extremely helpful to me. I teach people, it's what I do, and I suspect it wouldn't be fun to be married to me if I slipped and let myself get into that mode in a relationship.

I tell people that they need to adopt a policy of Zero Criticism. Zero Criticism has an extraordinary power in your relationship. Notice, it doesn't mean "zero communication." Because communication is very different from criticism.

Communication happens when you're emotionally balanced and calm. Communication happens when you're talking about *the way things are*. And criticism is where you're saying, "You need to be different because..."

Zero Criticism is a reliable cure for the false idea that the situation is making you unhappy, when it's actually your attitude toward it. Change your attitude, and the unhappiness goes away, and then you can change the situation.

I've seen remarkable changes happen when people stop criticizing. Maybe you can't go all the way to Zero, but you can come close.

At the start of my second marriage, I realized that I had used up a lifetime supply of criticism. My criticism credit card was maxed, and I had no margin to let myself criticize anymore.

So I had to start not criticizing. It would try to rise out of me like a gusher, and instead of letting it erupt I would leave the room. I might be very upset, but I wasn't passing the feeling on. I threw soft objects at the wall, and I walked furiously, or I found other ways to break the cycle without making it worse and digging a chasm between us.

Women today are trained to criticize all the time, in the name of “speaking your truth” and “asking for what you want.”

And speaking your truth, and asking for what you want are fine in their context. But you have to be very, very careful to understand if it’s coming across as criticism.

The key is to know that it takes a lot to make a relationship work, and you need to have somebody who is in the right flow with you. And that’s why lots of people remain single. Because it’s just not an age anymore where it’s all going to work out by applying a set of simple rules. We’re dealing with new *principles*, and we can practice those principles all the time.

Everything I’ve said today applies to every single relationship you’ll ever have, even quite apart from anything intimate and romantic. So practice where you are. Be every bit as attentive to every relationship as you’ll promise to be when you meet that special person. And if you’re all-in, all the time, you’ll become what you’re trying to attract. And then you’ll inevitably attract it. Because otherwise he or she won’t be attracted to you, and you’ll keep getting people who push all the wrong buttons.

In the absolutely best relationships, it's a hundred percent effort all the time. Because there's no time when happiness comes without self-discipline.

And that's one of the biggest lies our culture tries to tell us. It's a fundamental principle for having success on every level, from the fleeting relationships we have while standing in line at the grocery store, to a lifelong partnership, to the final relationship where we merge our consciousness in God.

We think we can be happy by putting out very little effort. We think that we'll be happy if it comes to us effortlessly, for free. But the way human beings are made is that the greatest happiness comes when we master ourselves.

That's where real freedom and power come from, through self-mastery.

When you've mastered something, you can look back on the times you thought you had it easy, and you may have enjoyed it, but you had nothing afterward. But when you've mastered yourself in a situation, you've gained something of great value – you've gained a power to create happiness in your life. To get along with everybody in the



world, not least the one you're married to, requires a profound level of self-mastery.

People talk about "getting into the hard work of relationships."

They say, "I'm willing to do the work."

And generally they are, but they really aren't. And yet life is unrelenting, and life requires it absolutely.

A woman said to me, "Why don't you people at Ananda, who have really good marriages, talk more about marriage as a spiritual path?"

I thought about it, and I said, "Well, that seems like a good idea." So I thought about it some more, and then I had to get back to her and say, "Because there's no such thing."

I said, "Those of us who are successful in our marriages have recognized that our marriages are absolutely the same as everything else in our lives - because exactly the same principles apply. It's the thought that your marriage is different and requires different rules that makes it so much harder to make it work."

Your marriage is just another condition of life where you have an opportunity to be fully conscious, to be selfless, and to be mature and self-disciplined. It's just one

more opportunity to practice the deep, overarching spiritual strengths that give us happiness in every situation.

Everything in your life is trying to offer you that same opportunity. That's what life is - it's a process of growing. And you can't draw a circle around it, because growth happens everywhere. It may have a slightly different set of conditions in a relationship. But so does everything else have unique conditions.

When you learn to play the flute, it's the same. Whenever you do something well, and you get the joy of it, it's because you've mastered yourself.

There's a weird idea in the culture today, promoted by TV, movies, romance novels, advertising, and popular songs, that there's a mythical Big Happy that will happen to you.

The popular culture tries to beat it into us that we can have the Big Happy completely outside the laws that operate in every other area of our lives. They tell us that it's about falling in love and having an effortless romantic relationship. And it's a complete fiction.

Popular music very effectively tries to convince us that we can have an easy ride to happiness. Music touches our

hearts directly, in sentimental, dreamy ways that turn off the filter of a higher kind of discrimination.

The music today sends a completely false message. I can't listen to the popular music - it's so awful. But I do watch old movies on occasion, and I watch how they suck you in. You want so much to think, "Yes, that's so true to life, and it's exactly what I want." But it isn't. It's a terrible lie, and in our culture we've fallen completely for the lie.

We've bought a lie that's so big and over-reaching that when you're in a perfectly fine relationship that's going exactly as it should, your mind will drag up these images from the culture and you'll begin to wonder if maybe there's something better. Because your perfectly good relationship isn't giving you the fictional romantic heart-attack blowout ecstasy that you've been hearing about.

A woman told me about an awful movie that she'd watched, and she said, "That's exactly the kind of relationship I'm looking for."

I'm not often shocked into silence, but I was speechless. I didn't know what to say, because the relationship in the movie wasn't remotely attractive to me, and more, it was completely phony. Yet this poor girl, a

fine girl, had bought into the idea that her life could match that fiction.

It's a fight to live in this culture and understand what truly gives us happiness. But once you understand that life is an adventure in self-awakening, and a total challenge that will take a hundred percent of your energy and self-discipline, and that nobody is ever going to give you anything for free, you can start to have a really good time. Because you aren't always feeling betrayed and upset that you aren't getting something that doesn't exist. And you aren't always imagining that the people in your life, and the conditions in your life, are making you unhappy because they aren't living up to your mythic expectations.

When you learn to accept reality, and to master yourself so that you can live well in that reality, you find that you can win your life's battle and be happy.

Part 6: How Does Communication Happen? –  
Making a Heart Connection

I have absolutely no inner calling now to counsel people about their relationships. But if they ask me, I suggest that they try thinking like a mother.

If a child puts out even a tiny effort to do something, and the mother says, “Oh, honey, that’s just so perfect!” – and if it isn’t true, then you’re depriving the child of an opportunity to learn how life really works.

A more expansive approach is to think of the reasons why the child didn’t put out real energy, and help them experience the fulfillment and satisfaction of working hard and experiencing the joy of success through self-mastery.

But you need to help them in a way that’s kind and compassionate and encouraging, so they’ll be able to go forward with energy and confidence. That’s the right kind of communication, because it’s the selfless, truthful, and considerate way to communicate.

There’s a completely false idea in our culture that people learn best if we tell them what’s wrong with them, and that we need to criticize them so they’ll grow. But I learned a very long time ago that it isn’t true.

I spent many years under the guidance of Swami Kriyananda. He was the most brilliant leader I've known, and there was a very special art that I watched him manifest over and over, endlessly. With every single person of the many thousands he interacted with over the years, he always managed to maintain a connection of the heart.

With Swamiji, it was never about whether you were good enough, or if you were doing a good enough job - and as soon as you stop producing, I'll withdraw my love from you.

There was always a connection of the heart, where you knew, "I love you because you're a child of God, and I love the God in you. Even if you're a terrible person, I love the God who is manifesting as you, and who is learning these lessons in your form."

Communication happens, first of all, when there's a connection of the heart. And of course, in marriage and family life there has to be that kind of heart connection, or you'll feel used by each other.

So, number one, you have to maintain that heart connection. And if you're in it simply for what you can get out of others, they'll know it instinctively and without fail. And if you love them only because they meet a

certain standard - "I loved you when you were thinner" - they'll know it, and they'll run away from you as fast as they can.

There was a cartoon that said: "A woman should marry an archeologist, because the older she gets, the more interesting she'll be to him." And it's true, in a way, because the more deeply you understand a person's reality, the more you love them.

When you feel respected for who you are, and when you feel sympathized with, with all your shortcomings, it's much easier to be open and receptive. It's wonderful to feel that way if a wise person is suggesting what you should do. But if you're with someone who's just harping on about what's wrong with you, you'll resist, and rightly so.

Most of us know what's wrong with us, and most of us know what we should be doing. And we need someone who's totally kind and compassionate to help us understand why we aren't doing it, and to give us the confidence that we can do it.

I'm a procrastinator. I put things off, because I don't like to commit to being anywhere at a specific time, and because I simply don't like to make decisions.

Years ago, I was organizing a lecture tour for Ananda. And my second husband wasn't a procrastinator - whenever he touched a piece of paper he resolved it immediately. So he could only imagine that the reason I wasn't bringing this project to a focus was that I wasn't aware of the dangers. He tried to help me by explaining all of the hells I was about to unleash upon myself if I didn't get busy and buckle down and get the tour organized.

But the reason I wasn't getting down to it was that I was afraid. I was afraid that I would make the wrong decisions. I was afraid of making commitments that I might not be able to keep. And the more he told me about all the fresh hells that would break loose, the less capable I felt of doing anything about it.

My first impulse was to be mad at him for not understanding. But I could sense that he was being a friend. He wasn't being judgmental. But I had to explain to him that I was just feeling incredibly nervous about it, and that he needed to help me be less afraid, and just try to make me feel secure and competent. Because he was reinforcing my fears.



To his everlasting credit, he immediately got the point, and he never again tried to influence me by fear, because it doesn't work.

At the same time, because he was so good at understanding what moves me, he could safely say an enormous number of things that fell under the category of constructive criticism. When he spoke to me, I would know that he didn't have issues of anger or impatience. A great deal of what I would say to him was about me, but very little of what he said to me was about him. He was a terrific teacher in that way. And when he gave me advice, there wasn't a break in communication.

It's also fair to say that most of us wish that we could do better, but at this point in our lives we have to accept and acknowledge and respect that this is who we are.

"I wish I could handle this, but I can't." That's a very fair thing to say, and it's good communication. You don't have to be all-powerful and strong and perfectly self-sacrificing before you can feel that you have a license to communicate. Because otherwise it isn't healthy. You just have to be appropriately honest with your reality.

All right, let's close with a prayer.

Heavenly Father, Divine Mother, Friend, Beloved God, saints and sages of all religions, we open our hearts and minds to Your uplifting influence. Help each of us to move forward with courage and love into that perfect experience of unconditional love, giving, and receiving, which is our destiny. Aum. Peace. Amen.