

# Creative Relationships

Spiritual Practices to Build  
Healthy, Happy Relationships

DICK RAUSCHER



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Dick Rauscher

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# INTRODUCTION

Relationships are the foundation of marriages, families, communities, and our global human culture. When our relationships are healthy they promote happiness, bring a sense of meaning into our lives, and increase our ability to be loving and compassionate.

When our relationships are unhealthy, they are a primary source of conflict and unhappiness.

The articles contained in this book were originally written for my weekly Stonyhill-Nuggets.com newsletter. Readers asked if I would publish a collection of what I consider to be some the more important “relationship” articles published on the Stonyhill blog site. Thanks to reader encouragement, you are holding that book in your hands.

Twenty-five years as a NYS licensed mental health counselor in private practice taught me several important insights needed to create happiness and healthy relationships. Many of those insights along with relationship insights drawn from ancient Eastern spiritual practices are included in this book.

The most important of those insights is the realization that almost all relationship conflict is created when our ego unconsciously distorts reality.

When we begin to “see” the true reality of “*what is*”, relationship conflict begins to disappear. We begin to grow spiritually. We become more compassionate toward those around us. In other words, the creation of healthy relationships requires that we grow spiritually and spiritual growth is simply learning to “see” and accept the world as it is; not as our ego would like it to be.

Healthy relationships are based on the concept that authentic spiritual growth “*is*” growth in self-awareness... and growth in self-awareness “*is*” authentic spiritual growth. They are one in the same. Until we grow spiritually, our relationships will driven by our ego and will be conflictual.

Each of the articles in this book contains a relationship spiritual practice designed to increase your self-awareness and draw you deeper into the spiritual realities of your own mind, and the fundamental spiritual realities of the real world. These spiritual

practices will help strengthen your relationships with yourself and others.

For example, some of the insights covered in the book include;

- Our happiness, attitudes and emotions are “chosen” by our ego, not created by the outside world.
- There is no dualism or judgmental either/or thinking in nature; only unity and oneness.
- Everything in creation is interconnected and interdependent. Our separateness is an illusion created by our primitive ego.
- When we don’t understand ourselves we tend to judgmentally project the shadows or undesirable parts of ourselves onto others.
- Virtually all “adults” are unconsciously controlled by the reactive, immature primitive ego of our seven-year-old inner-child.
- Almost all pain and suffering in life is the result of consciously or unconsciously resisting reality.

As we begin to understand these simple realities, we begin to awaken our consciousness. We become more enlightened. We begin to let of our ego illusions that have been creating so much conflict in our relationships with each other and the world. Our ability to create and sustain healthy relationships with those around us grows stronger.

### **A Word of Caution**

The articles and spiritual practices contained in this book cannot just be read. They must be *intentionally* incorporated into your everyday life. When you have embraced an intentional commitment to grow and evolve, the material contained in this book will have the power to change your life, create healthier, less conflicted relationships, and create the kind of life you have dreamed about living.

I truly hope the relationship insights contained in this book are helpful for you on your journey toward an awakened consciousness.

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# RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

## Authenticity and Awareness Are the First Steps toward Loving Yourself

Do you love yourself? How do you know?

For years I read about the importance of learning to love myself; how learning to love myself was the key that would open the door to passion and joy in my life; that self-love was the doorway into happiness.

I believed what I was reading. The problem was I didn't have a clue on how to actually do it. I knew I often felt inadequate but I always assumed that inadequacy only meant that my self-esteem was lower than I would have liked. I thought feeling adequate and loving myself were separate subjects.

It took time, but today I know differently. Learning to love yourself *and* knowing that you are OK are actually the same subject. When self-love is part of the foundation of our life, achieving happiness, success, and creating healthier relationships requires far less effort.

In fact, virtually everything of value in life requires that we first learn to love ourselves. When we do, life is not only a lot more fun, it has a far deeper sense of meaning and purpose.

Regardless of your background, regardless of where you are coming from, *learning to love yourself is far easier to achieve than most people think*. It simply requires learning two basic facts about our ego and how it actually functions.

**Fact #1:**

Our ego is primarily concerned with making sure we have a solid sense of self-identity.

**Fact #2:**

Our ego is also concerned with keeping us safe from physical and emotional harm.

What's really interesting is how your ego actually accomplishes those two goals. Establishing your self-identity begins very early in childhood when your ego learns to hide in the words "me", "my", and "mine". Your ego learned very early in life that unless you had a strong sense of "self" or "me" identity it would be a "no-body", a "no-thing"; you would cease to "be" or "exist". So your ego decided it would do whatever it took to avoid anything that felt unsafe or could threaten your self-identity.

For example, it learned that feelings of rejection, criticism, ridicule, guilt, and shame were emotionally hurtful. They were dangerous threats to your self-identity that made you feel badly about yourself. So it naturally assumed that if your self-identity was firmly grounded in feelings of inadequacy and incompetence you would avoid taking on any challenges that could lead to those six dangerous threats. You would have learned to avoid change or taking risks.

Because the primitive ego of your unconscious inner-child had already firmly established the "belief" or "illusion" that you were incompetent and inadequate, unless you lived in a family that very intentionally and routinely affirmed how competent, wonderful, and loveable you were, it makes sense that you would have grown up *believing the illusions of inadequacy and incompetence were true.*

They would have become the powerful "belief" or "illusion" *created by your mind* that has been unconsciously limiting your life. A belief created by a very young child long before you had the ability to think logically. Fortunately it is neither real, nor is it accurate. And what was created "by" the mind can be removed through awareness "from" the mind.

Once you become self-aware and awaken to fact that the "belief" or "illusion" you created in your mind has been limiting your life, the illusion will quickly begin to lose its power.

Attempting to rid yourself of your ego illusions or change your beliefs by force of will is not possible. So don't waste your time or your energy. *The ego cannot, and will not, let go of your self-identity.* The only way you can change the illusion is through



awareness. When you become aware that what you have always believed to be true is actually nothing more than an illusion created by a very young toddler, you will quickly begin to dissolve the illusion.

Awareness and ego “illusions” cannot co-exist in your mind. The illusions of inadequacy and incompetence are the darkness that have been limiting your life, but awareness is the light that has the power to drive out the darkness.

Awakening to the illusions your ego has created is easy. If you have read this far you are already beginning to awaken. That part was easy. The challenge will be learning how to stay awake. Your ego will do whatever it takes to keep you safe, so be ready to go back to sleep. Only *you* can do what is needed to remain awakened and aware. No one outside of yourself can do it for you.

But there is a very powerful spiritual practice that will help you. It’s called authenticity or “learning to trust that who you are is OK”. The spiritual practice is simply making the intentional choice to begin living more authentically and more transparently. Letting people see who you *really* are. Over time your ego will become attached to authenticity and authenticity will become your ego’s new “self-identity”.

It’s easy to know if you are being authentic with the person in front of you. Just pay attention. If you find yourself get nervous, sweaty palms, jittery, self-conscious, feeling inadequate.....you are not being authentic. You are playing a role based on what you think the other person wants you to be, or who you think you “should” be. Just be aware. It will wake you up.

Your authentic self, who you *really* are, is your pure observing consciousness. Everything else you think you are is an illusion created by your ego.

Authenticity attracts authenticity, and authentic people are fun to be around. Making the choice to begin living more authentically can be a challenge initially, but if you are willing to continue the spiritual practice of living more authentically, you’ll find that your spirit will begin to like the feeling of lightness and freedom that you experience.

That sense of freedom is what loving yourself feels like.



## Your Relationship with Reality

Sometimes I think that our journey in the wilderness of life should run backwards. It would make more sense if it did. For example, we would begin our relationship with a life partner and have children in our seventies and eighties while we actually have some wisdom.

By the time our children reached adulthood we would be well on our way to getting younger and dumber. All of our important tasks in life would be completed while we still had wisdom. Then we could go out into the world, have adventures, build careers, drink beer, go to parties, and do all the dumb things we do when we're younger. But we would do them at a time in life when it wouldn't matter anymore.

Unfortunately, like so many people, I went through the beer drinking and party stage while I was working on an engineering degree. Then degree in hand, I moved into marriage, began raising a family and struggled to succeed, to be happy, and to achieve. I worked hard but looking back I realize I didn't have a clue about what was truly important in life.

I worked in the corporate world as an engineer and later in engineering management. My dream was to be a millionaire by the time I was thirty. Then disillusioned with the corporate world, I dropped out and tried homesteading for six years. I quickly learned that our ancestors did not live in the "good old days". They worked from morning to night simply surviving. So I stopped milking goats and went back to school, got a master's degree in theology, trained as an analytic pastoral psychotherapist, opened a counseling practice focused on helping people heal and grow, and eventually went through the pain of a divorce.

There was a slowly growing awareness that I was on a relentless journey into the future; the awareness that life doesn't give us the option of going back and living it over again. I was living the only life I would ever have.

Eventually the pain of living my life unconsciously caught up with me. I entered therapy and began the journey into "self"; a journey that took me into the shadows of my pain and my own

dark nature. For the first time in my life I was working on my own issues.

Like many people, my lack of self-awareness and unconscious living had caused me to make mistakes and choose behaviors that were hurtful to others as well as myself. As I reflected back on that time in my life I was amazed at my lack of awareness, and saddened at the pain I had caused others.

It was the decision to enter therapy that began my love affair with growth, insight and wisdom. As I awakened and began to grow in self-consciousness, I vowed that I would never again live life unconsciously or unaware. The commitment to live a more conscious life has driven my growth and become my primary purpose in life ever since.

A friend asked me recently what I thought the most important insight or learning has been for me these last thirty years; the time of life I call my second adulthood. I thought for a moment and then said, the insight that has most impacted my life is the knowledge that my relationship with reality is far and away the most important relationship I will ever have.

The puzzled look on her face told me I would have to go a bit deeper and explain what I meant. I went on to explain that our development as a human being begins in childhood. It's in those first six or seven years of life that we develop our primitive ego, or childhood psyche. Our childhood ego tends to be narcissistic and self-focused. It uses an either-or, black-and-white thinking process that splits the world into safe and unsafe, good and bad, and right and wrong. It also picks up beliefs that tend to distort reality. I told her I call these beliefs bent nickel beliefs.

Before she could give me another look of puzzlement, I went a bit deeper into the concept of a bent nickel belief. For example, in early childhood we assume the world should give us what we want, *when we want it*. If we have a dirty diaper we want it changed right "*now*". If it's not, we open our mouth and scream until someone *does* change it.

We come to believe that we are the ruler of the universe (a bent nickel belief). We think that others should be able to read our mind and meet our needs without our having to ask (more bent nickel beliefs).

As we grow older, instead of modifying these primitive ego beliefs, we tend to make them more rigid and inflexible. We pour concrete on them. I told her virtually all of the pain I have caused others, and myself, are the result of black-and-white, either-or

thinking, or from holding too tightly to bent nickel reality distorting beliefs.

Then I shared with her my bent nickel metaphor; how bent nickel beliefs create poor self-esteem, frustration, unhappiness, and a lack of success in life. Let's define a successful life as a tall pile of nickels stacked one on top of another. Most of us could easily create a reasonably tall or successful stack of nickels if we were careful. In this metaphor, our life would be happy and successful.

But now try that experiment by placing a "bent nickel" at the base of your stack. No matter how hard to try, you will never get the stack more than a few nickels high before the stack falls over. In other words, your stack (your life) will never get very high, happy, or successful. In fact, the harder you try to get your stack of nickels taller, the more frustrated and depressed you will become. Eventually you will assume you just don't have the ability to create a happy and successful life. You will quit trying.

Instead of blaming the problem on the bent nickel reality distorting belief at the base of your stack, you will assume you're not competent or capable.

I shared with her that this metaphor taught me the most important wisdom insight of my life. The realization that the bent nickel beliefs that most distorted reality and created virtually all of the pain and unhappiness I was experiencing in life were

- a) judgmental dualistic, either-or thinking, and
- b) the primitive ego belief that my self-identity was based on the need to be right.

It helped me realize that my ego driven dualistic thinking had me at war with reality; at war with the whole universe. Whenever reality presented me with something that conflicted with one of my many firmly held beliefs, instead of accepting the reality of "what is", I resisted and attempted to change it so it would more comfortably conform to my beliefs.

Like all bent nickel beliefs, dualistic thinking and the need to be right almost always led to conflict and frustration; which left me feeling weak, overwhelmed, unhappy, and anxious. Doing battle with the universe was annoying and exhausting.

When I was unable to shape reality to what it "*should*" be, I tended to become frustrated and more self-absorbed, self-focused, and irritated. Because my ego had created my self-identity around my bent nickel beliefs, rather than questioning the beliefs, my ego

harden them and moved me defensively deeper into my false self and away from my true, essential, authentic self.

Of course, whenever this happened, I was so focused on being right, my ability to embrace mutuality, compassion, flexibility, affirmation, unconditional love, and caring all but disappeared.

More than any other form of conscious, dualistic thinking made it all but impossible for me to drop certainty, embrace humility and move into an emptiness of ego; the three qualities essential to living a happy, successful, spiritually grounded life.

My journey in the wilderness has taught me that black-and-white, dualistic *thinking*, and the need to be right that emerges from dualism, are the primary unconscious enemies of happiness and peace in life.

The opposition to reality left me unable to live awakened and conscious of the present moment; the ability to live in the reality of “*now*”. Today I choose to accept life as it “*is*”, not struggling to change it to what it “*should*” be.