

Celebrating Relationship

Being in deep relationship with others trumps any other approach to learning about ourselves. We may take a journey into ourselves through solitude, meditation, and a myriad other ways to get better acquainted with ourselves, and raise our consciousness and awareness of what makes us tick. At times we may need space and time to disentangle from the complexities and crossed messages that play out when in relationship with others. However nothing beats relationship for creating an environment that enables growth.

I have enjoyed solitude, going on silent retreats and developing awareness of my inner world. None of that comes close to the pressure cooker of being in relationship with another human being and learning while in process. I manage that in small doses, then claim some space for myself before re-engaging.

Also, I am not suggesting all relationships are positive. Some are diabolical, or at least damaging, and that we allow them to persist suggests lessons of self-worth and of ending abuse we have yet to learn.

As a young person I felt awkward and uncomfortable with myself, and even more so with and around others. Key messages from my internal critic were that I was inadequate and unworthy, and no one would want to know me. No wonder I felt awkward. Those messages still play though with less intensity. They interfere with engaging smoothly and easily. I watch others who seem



Being in relationship

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Abstract

Explores the deep learning and growth available by being 'in relationship' with others

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to flitter easily into and out of connection with others, and sometimes I feel jealous. I wish it was that easy for me.

However, I have learnt how to be with others, some others, in a deep, intimate and very real way. This includes recognising that:

- a relationship comprises three primary entities: **them**, **me** and the **in between**.
- deepening a relationship requires me to share something of myself. As I am more vulnerable and trusting I invite the other to join me. What they do then is their choice.
- as a relationship deepens feelings are unleashed from within as past experiences (often unconsciously) manifest as current behaviour. Recognising those feelings are not about this person but are about past wounds can assist the relationship building process, especially if I don't make the person with me the dumping ground for my past hurts. Staying with those feelings and allowing myself to be seen and held in and through those moments is healing. Dumping them on the other person is damaging for them and the relationship.

- being with the other person as they struggle in their own experience is a privilege so long as they are not dumping their past on me, making me the target of their pain.
- empathy, forgiveness and love are crucial ingredients for moving through hurt between me and the other person.
- in addition to the three primary entities, a relationship includes all those who have been part of both our lives. Their voices, their shaping of our beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, and how they may have hurt us may manifest in our minds or be reflected in the other person at any moment.
- not all relationships are equal. Some people will not respect or positively respond to my vulnerability or genuine attempts at being in relationship. Choosing wisely about when and where and with whom to share myself is important.
- being in relationship is a dance. It is not a linear process, going deeper, deeper, and deeper still. Instead, it is learning how to engage with this person in front of me, different from all others. Which steps do we share and that enable us to flow together? Which steps do we struggle with

and how do we develop in them? What causes us to step on each other's toes or to trip and fall? How do we pick ourselves up and start again? When is it appropriate to let go and move away? When do we choose to return and reconnect?

These things I have learned are about being in relationship with anyone, not just an intimate partner. The degree of intimacy ("*in to me see*") and engagement can be contextual, but often it is choice.

Being in relationships is not an easy exercise. It can be deeply rewarding. At the end of the day success is, in my mind, defined by how I have engaged with others, and what I have learnt about being more fully and authentically with others. In the process I will have seen aspects of myself previously unconscious, and encountered challenges that require me to dig deep and develop new capacities. By being in meaningful relationship with others we have the opportunity to learn about ourselves more deeply and intensely than any other way I know.

What have you learned about being in relationship with others? What gold have you gleaned from your experiences?

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 2 (Life is a Journey ... Enjoy It!) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [*Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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