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NEGOTIATING GOOD BOUNDARIES

BY DONALD MONTAGNA

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Today we're ending with a theme of relationships to end our year, and I want to dedicate my opening words. Today is Nancy and my 22nd anniversary, which means that I am 44 so that means I've been living with Nancy for half of my life. We've spent half of our lives together. And it just seems numerologically meaningful, so I want to dedicate these to her.

The opening words come from Felix Adler's Philosophy of Life, which he wrote about 50 years after the founding of the Ethical Society, and they're entitled "What friendship means to me."

"A certain personal attraction, mutual aid and comfort, taking counsel together, sympathy in joy and in sorrow. These are valuable elements of friendship, but they don't even touch the essential point. The friend ideally is one whom you stand alongside as a spectator of his or her spiritual development, acknowledging your friend's advance toward the master end of life disinterestedly, and yet with the deepest personal concern. Your friend is a mirror in which you see the stages of your own spiritual progress reflected.

1 Spiritual appreciation, appreciation of the inner self,
2 beneath the everyday mask, is the greatest gift of
3 friendship. And to manifest it is the greatest of arts.

4

5 The best part of being the leader of the
6 Washington Ethical Society is the quality and the kind
7 of relationships that I get to have with you. In
8 addition to the ordinary times that I spend with many of
9 you, I also get to consult with you at times like in the
10 middle of courtship or in the middle of a marriage or
11 childraising, or in career issues, times of grieving,
12 and in courses that are about subjects like leadership
13 and relationship-building. And I get an opportunity,
14 through platforms like this one and through courses, to
15 study and think about the kind of issues that we're all
16 facing in our everyday lives.

17 What ends up happening is, as I see each
18 person's very unique life and way of being, I notice,
19 though, some incredible similarities in patterns,
20 issues, that virtually all of us seem to be facing as we
21 pursue a particular goal, and those are the things that
22 I like to record and report on.

 I have to admit, it's amusing to me that when
talking to most singles about their life, they think of
coupling as a greener pasture. And many times when I

1 meet with couples, they think about those greener
2 pastures of being single.

3 It leads me to question, why is love so a
4 struggle, in which people get hurt and disappointed and
5 frustrated? Why is it that way? I believe the answer
6 is that we're not obviously born knowing how to build
7 good relationships. We have, each one of us, to go
8 through trial and error and all the frustrations in
9 that, in order to go up that learning curve, the same
10 learning curve you have to go up to learn tennis or be
11 an accountant or cook or anything. We have to learn the
12 art of it. And judging from the number of self-help
13 books that are out there on relationships, many of us
14 are interested in and feel some personal yearning for an
15 ever better and better relationship with one other human
16 being.

17 Now I personally believe that this also is an
18 important social evolutionary step that our generation
19 and maybe many to come is facing. Ultimately, human
20 beings survive because we know and can utilize our own
21 human nature, our own consciousness, our own creativity,
22 and we do that through social cooperation. And I think
knowing ourselves and knowing how to effectively relate
to one and many, many people is the cutting edge of what
human beings are learning how to do now. And I think

1 the crucible of it is the one-on-one relationship where
2 you really get to know your nature and very in-depth and
3 over a great amount of time and over many, many years,
4 another human being. From that, we can make assumptions
5 and judgments about what even a stranger might be like.

6 So I really see that evolutionarily, the
7 personal relationship has become very important. And
8 historically, this one-on-one type of relationship has
9 been held together by laws and the authority of
10 community and family, and we're now living in an era
11 where divorce is possible -- the law is not going to
12 prevent it; even our families don't prevent it. The
13 only thing that holds a relationship now together is the
14 quality of the spiritual bond. People have to be
15 getting enough from each other to make it worth staying
16 together. The outside pressure is pretty much gone.

17 So it makes it more important that we pay
18 attention to how do you build that spiritual bond.

19 My thesis today is that creating
20 life-enhancing relationships requires very specific
21 spiritual skills, and I believe the number of skills is
22 around 25 (laughter). And today I'm going to talk about
seven of them.

 My true purpose in this is to introduce a
theory which is the basis of a program which is the

1 continuation of our current Relationship-Building
2 program, and starting next fall, we'll be offering a set
3 of courses which will support support groups, the
4 formation of support groups.

5 The first class I'm going to start in the fall
6 is going to be limited, because we have a limited number
7 of teachers, but I'm going to have up here a sheet if
8 people are interested in participating in any way in
9 this thing after you hear what I have to say, to sign it
10 and we'll keep you informed.

11 Today I want to kind of give an overview of
12 the kind of thinking and the kind of practical skills I
13 have in mind.

14 I want to begin by defining two words. One is
15 the word "spiritual" and the other is the word
16 "boundary". By "spiritual" I don't mean anything
17 supernatural or ghostly. Spirit as defined in the
18 dictionary means the animating force within the person.

19 Most of us I think respond to each other
20 primarily on the level of aura, that every person has an
21 aura and we respond to it, but we seldom use the word
22 aura and we seldom think very carefully about what we
mean by a person's spirit. An aura, again defined by
the dictionary, are the distinctive qualities that
characterize a particular person, that each one of us

1 has a way of being that we bring to other people, to
2 relationships.

3 Now the spirit, the animating force of a
4 person, creates some distinctive characteristics,
5 creates an aura.

6 Now some people are just fun to be with, no
7 matter what you're doing with them. And some people are
8 serious to be with, no matter what you're doing with
9 them. And some people have a lot of high energy and
10 some people are rather tranquil, peaceful to be with.
11 Some people are very fearful in their energy and some
12 are just very comfortable and confident.

13 But the variety, the infinite variety of ways
14 of being that people present, the spirit that they
15 present, is just made up of looks and sounds and
16 feelings and movements and tones of voice and touches
17 and manners and actions that make up how we present
18 ourselves.

19 Relating our spirit, our aura, our unique
20 distinct way of being with someone else's unique way of
21 being is the art form that we're talking about here.

22 Now the second word, "boundaries". Boundaries
are the outer limits of our aura, the outer limits of
our personality. Some of the boundaries out there are
essential. We need them to protect ourselves, to be

1 safe, to have our own unique identity. But other
2 boundaries are really marks of the frontiers beyond
3 which we have not yet traveled. They're just temporary,
4 to be negotiated.

5 Now psychologists use the phrase "ego
6 boundaries", and that includes basically your
7 self-concept, who you think you are. It's both your
8 strength but also the limitation of who you can be.
9 Your habits, your feelings that define your identity.
10 Those are your ego boundaries.

11 Now inside your ego boundaries there is a
12 state of being identified -- I identify it as me, and
13 you identify it as you. You are that experience that
14 lies within your ego boundaries. And if you go beyond
15 your ego boundaries you start feeling very upset and
16 uncertain and would like to get back inside your ego
17 boundaries.

18 Now in a relationship, boundaries have to
19 interact with each other for people to get together.
20 Intimacy requires that your boundary be permeable, that
21 people can pass through your boundary. Without that
22 permeability, no relationship is possible.

 But what will it feel like having somebody
else inside your boundary? A good relationship, having
it feel good with someone inside your boundary, depends

1 on some successful boundary negotiations.

2 Now before addressing the how-to question,
3 how-to bring the boundaries together successfully, I'd
4 like to first focus on what success means, what I think
5 success is within a boundary, what would it look like if
6 someone were successfully integrated.

7 Well, I ask you to think about this. Do you
8 think that there is a basic human spirit, I mean
9 something inherent in human nature, that transcends our
10 individual personalities, such that we have a universal
11 part of our nature, as well as the unique part of who we
12 are? Is there some common human nature characteristics
13 that we all share?

14 Well, I answer that question "yes", I think
15 there are some common dimensions to our human nature,
16 and that the human being would not have survived and
17 would not prosper unless these following elements were
18 not basic to our nature.

19 The first one is a caring spirit. If human
20 beings, more than not, didn't care, then infants would
21 never grow up. We have the longest infancy period. We
22 require more caring in the human being than any other
 animal, for a longer period of time, and for a greater
 degree of dependency. Caring has to be basic to our
 nature, despite all the examples to the contrary.

1 Caring and a sense of fairness. Again, many
 2 examples to the contrary can be drawn, but if human
 3 beings didn't yearn for a fairness in relationships as
 4 much as they yearn for beauty, there would not be the
 5 trust that leads to the social cooperation, which is the
 6 reason human beings do well on earth. How many examples
 7 of criminality and lack of common cooperation you can
 8 find, but on the net, if we are not a cooperative
 9 species, we do not survive. So I say the ability to be
 10 fair has to be pretty intrinsic to our nature.

11 Caring, fair and creative. I believe that as
 12 the heart beats, the brain's function is to create. We
 13 are creating as long as we're alive, because that's what
 14 the organ does. Creativity.

15 Caring, fairness, creativity, joy. I believe
 16 that if it wasn't fun to be alive, who would bother?
 17 There has to be a joy in just being alive, and human
 18 beings experience that joy.

19 Finally, purposefulness. Caring, fairness,
 20 creativity, joyful and purposeful. I think that there
 21 is a sense of mission and meaning that people just yearn
 22 for, hunger for, want and need in order to give life
 some oomph.

So I believe that our human spirit, when it is
 in full health -- when we're born, we don't know what

1 physical health is and we don't know what spiritual and
2 emotional health is. We have to figure it out. The
3 species has been working on that. And I'm saying what I
4 would define health as, natural health, spiritual
5 health, is kindness, fairness, joyfulness, creativity
6 and purposefulness. And that when these dimensions are
7 in our spirit, if these dimensions are encouraged,
8 elicited out of us in a relationship, it feels very
9 successful. And when they're missing, it feels like not
10 quite healthy.

11 Now I'm going to talk about seven broad areas,
12 seven skills today, but I want to start actually with
13 the last one, the hardest one, the one that I think it
14 takes a lot of work to do really well. But it's the one
15 I believe that we want, we long for, that makes us go
16 through all the others.

17 The seventh skill is being able to lead and to
18 let go to an enchantment. Now it may take all of our
19 lives to really be good at enchantments, and some of us
20 never get there, but I'd like to describe a little bit
21 what I think enchantment is. Again, dictionary defines
22 enchantment as the state of being delighted completely.
It defines enchant to mean to cast a spell that charms
the spirit, charming the spirit with complete
delightless. Enchantment.

1 Now enchantments I see as moments that just
2 bring out the best, just one of these moments, a special
3 experience. We have a feeling of being one but
4 together, same time. It's a very definable experience
5 when you have it. Spiritually uplifting. You feel good
6 about them, good about you and good about being alive.
7 Life's great.

8 I know that when people are dating, if there
9 aren't a certain number of enchantments, at last one,
10 the relationship doesn't go on. And then there often
11 there's a honeymoon period where there might be a
12 couple. But once you get married, after the relationship
13 has been on a while, the relationship might become
14 comfortable, but does it remain enchanting? I mean
15 maybe you've used up all the enchantments you know
16 together.

17 The fact is, I believe from an unscientific
18 study but careful observation, that it only takes one
19 enchantment every couple of years to have a couple think
20 they have a great relationship.

21 I start with an ideal that says, I think it
22 would be great to be able to lead and let go to
enchantments as just something that I can do on any day
and any evening that I want to, just in the process of
life. A relationship without enchantment I see as like

1 a short-legged table. It wobbles all the time,
2 reminding you that something's missing. No matter how
3 beautiful a tablecloth, a centerpiece, the beautiful
4 settings -- what stays with you, your attention goes to
5 the short leg. And I think that's what happens in a
6 relationship. We go to working on with the other person
7 what we're missing.

8 And what I see repeatedly in the relationships
9 is that the fights are about toothpaste caps, money,
10 sex, bad habits, but beneath the issue, beneath the
11 practical problem, there are some boundary negotiations
12 going on. The real issue beneath the issue is how are
13 we going to interface, how are our boundaries going to
14 bump into each other, and how do we negotiate when they
15 bump in ways that we don't like. Those are the real
16 issues.

17 It's in order to create a space, a
18 relationship that is strong enough so that enchantment
19 can go on as a regular activity. That's what really
20 we're trying to work out under the surface.

21 Now being enchanted with someone if the person
22 is a one-night or an occasional stand is very nice, but
the idea of living with someone and being enchanted with
them a lot, like every day, could be very frightening.
I don't want to live with someone who has the power to

1 enchant me at any moment. I might lose who I am. The
2 pressure of being able to be in an enchanting
3 relationship requires an enormous amount of trust of the
4 other person and trust of yourself. And those are the
5 boundary issues. How do you create enough trust and
6 clarity of agreement in a relationship so that we can
7 surrender to enchantments, so that we care enough to
8 lead enchantments?

9 Before I go on to the how-to, I want to give
10 you a list here of what I think the basic enchantments
11 are. They come from Hinduism, these enchantments. I've
12 thought about them a good deal. The first thing after I
13 read them, you're going to start thinking about all the
14 things that should be on the list that aren't, and I've
15 done a lot of that thinking. But I find that these
16 really do cover the turf pretty well. Most things fit
17 into them, if you think about it.

18 Now you may be surprised by this list because
19 they're such simple pleasures, but I'd like you to
20 listen to the list from the point of view of have you
21 ever had an experience where this was a positive effect
22 on your spirit, and the second thing, you might want to
keep a list of how often you create them.

 The first enchantment is just appearance. I
mean physical beauty, fashion beauty, being in a

1 beautiful place. The enchantment of appearance.

2 The second one is questions. What's the
3 meaning of life? What are your childhood memories?
4 What's your favorite fantasy? How does the world really
5 work? Questions lead to enchantment.

6 The third one is playing. I find perhaps the
7 greatest benefit of being a father to young children is
8 rediscovering just the joy of being-here-now play.

9 The fourth one is singing. The fifth one is
10 dancing. And the sixth one is touching, from hugs to
11 sex to hand-holding. The seventh one is weeping. The
12 eighth one is laughing.

13 Let me turn attention now to the steps for
14 building relationship and the skills I think are needed
15 to create good boundaries. And again I welcome you to
16 check this list for yourself.

17 The first step in building a relationship, the
18 first spiritual skill is being able to be with yourself
19 alone, to be with yourself. Starting from the morning
20 alarm clock, most of us spend our day responding to the
21 demands of our environment, pleasing other people,
22 meeting the needs of family or work or friends, getting
our good and bad feelings by how well we please people
or how well some project of our moves forward in the
outer environment.

1 But in addition to this outer world that we
2 spend a lot of attention in, we each have also an inner
3 environment. We can be either conscious or unconscious
4 about our inner environment, but our consciousness is
5 flowing like a river night and day, sleep or awake. Our
6 consciousness is flowing and there are three basic
7 currents always interacting -- thoughts, feelings and
8 will (choices, actions) -- thoughts, feelings and will.

9 Now paying attention to our inner being --
10 listening, not being alone watching TV, not being alone
11 doing crossword puzzles, but being alone listening to
12 our inner TV stations, listening, following our own
13 intuition, putting through the day, following our will,
14 noticing our feelings, noticing our thoughts. Knowing
15 what's inside of us is step one of a boundary issue.

16 The test of being yourself, and I think this
17 is a much more difficult test than most of us allow --
18 the test of it is to be able to be yourself while you're
19 with somebody else. Can you remain aware of your
20 thoughts, your feelings, your will, when you are with
21 someone else, or are you trying to figure out where they
22 are and what you need to do and whatever? Are you able
to represent and express your own consciousness?

Now if relationship means that I'm going to
surrender my own inner reality, if I'm going to step

1 paying attention to myself in order to pay attention --
2 if that's what relationship is, the relationship is
3 doomed because no matter how good the couple is at
4 staying together, if there is not that sense of being
5 able to be alone, then a person will be cut off from
6 their own animating force, from their own spirit, and
7 eventually that feeling will become intolerable,
8 suffocating. And the fights may be about a hundred
9 little superficial matters, but when it becomes
10 intolerable there will be the energy to find a way to
11 push away the other person, in order to regain the
12 experience of being alone, so that you find again your
13 own spiritual force.

14 So being able to be yourself alone when you're
15 with another person is essential before you can begin to
16 relate.

17 Step two boundary issue is being able to
18 create a space for being with a person. By creating a
19 space I mean very concretely -- time, place and
20 opportunity. Time. Often we can be together in the
21 same space but we're talking about parallel play. Being
22 together, we're paying attention to each other, needs a
specific time, and it can also be draining as much as it
is enjoyable; exhausting as much as it's enjoyable.
It's an exertion. It's a fun exertion but it's an

1 exertion also, and you want a time to go back to being
2 alone. So it needs a beginning time and an ending time,
3 a boundary. And within that boundary, it's got to be a
4 good time, not a time that's good for me and not for
5 you; a good time for both of you. It's got to be
6 adequate time for the particular thing you want to do --
7 not too long, not too short. And you've got to be able
8 to start it and end it on time.

9 There has to be a boundary, to create some
10 time that is special, where your intention is to pay
11 attention, to relate intensely, and not just hand out in
12 parallel play.

13 Now singles make dates and so they create
14 time. Now couples live together, so they actually have
15 less time together, unless they make dates. And in the
16 relationship-building program we call it Being With
17 dates.

18 The second part of getting space is to get a
19 place. Now if you remember adolescence, mine was in
20 search of a place. And it wasn't a place to have sex or
21 anything like that. It was a place to be outside of
22 adult attention, to find out who we were when we were
alone. That's when I fell in love with the Park
Service. And Automobiles! Singles often though choose
places for early dates like shows -- movies or concerts,

1 which is really not a place at all where you can be
2 together. No enchantment can happen. Or sometimes
3 choosing early on one or the other's home or apartment,
4 which is so loaded with enchantment already.

5 I think creating an appropriate place in your
6 house, if you're a couple who lives together, so that
7 the purpose of that place, the reminder when you walk in
8 the door of that place, is a place of enchantment.

9 The third part of creating space is
10 opportunity, and that is about taking turns. Some of us
11 may be better at leading enchantments than others, so to
12 have a particular two-hour block where I am in charge
13 and you are attempting to let go, or you're in charge
14 next time. Opportunity for someone to lead and to let
15 go. The second kind is literally just dividing up the
16 time that we're together, so that each of us, our spirit
17 can be present.

18 Let me summarize so far to say that the space
19 of a relationship requires specific skills to create a
20 relationship, that is, one that is enhancing and
21 enchanting, and the steps are being yourself, able to
22 respond to your inner feelings, thoughts and will, even
in the presence of another; and the second is creating a
space for your relationship, a time, place and
opportunity.

1 The third one is saying no. Saying no.
2 Saying no with love, really. A relationship is allowing
3 someone to come into your spiritual space. It's like
4 inviting someone to come into your room. You want them
5 there, but you don't want them to take over. You don't
6 want them violating your room. So unless you can say
7 no, with love, you only have three other choice. You
8 can not allow anybody to come into your space at all.
9 No relationship. Or when a person upsets you, you can
10 throw them out of your room and not let them in again.
11 Or you can control people all the time they're in your
12 room. Sit down. Stand up. Not there. Over there.
13 Move. Don't touch that.

14 A new relationship is always testing to see if
15 both parties can say no constructively. How are you
16 going to handle no. And many of the fights are not
17 about the things they're about. The specifics have
18 their energy because we're negotiating about if you can
19 say no and how you're going to do it. Both parties want
20 the other one capable of taking a stand, being a parent
21 to their child, taking a stand kindly, but taking a
22 stand. And they test, because if they can't get it in
this relationship ever, this relationship isn't enough
for them. They keep testing, but they want you to win.
They want someone to win.

1 Now I think that certain no's are
2 non-negotiable, that an individual has to take 100
3 percent to make sure that they get these things, no
4 matter what. You don't depend on the other person. You
5 insist on them on your own. This is in ethics called
6 nonvolitional ethics. It means things that you won't
7 do, things that you won't have done. Negative.

8 To follow along, many of you may say yes, I
9 have these things in my relationship. I believe that
10 these things need to be explicitly stated out of one's
11 mouth: Yes, this is what I want; I understand that.
12 These are the things I think they are.

13 The first one is a no-hitting rule. I believe
14 that early in a relationship everybody is pushing each
15 other to the limit to find out whether the other person
16 is going to hit them or not. You have to find that out
17 about a person. You don't really know until you've
18 lived with them a lot, pushed all the buttons in some
19 way. Is the person going to not hit?

20 Most couples would say, I'd never do that,
21 never do that. Of course. But until you know, there is
22 always that fear, that uncertainty out there. I believe
that there has to be explicit discussion and explicit
agreement about no hitting.

The second one is no damage -- physical,

1 emotional, spiritual. No cruelty. That means no
2 button-pushing, pointing out irritating or upsetting
3 aspects of their personality or life at key moments. Or
4 name-calling. Name-calling is a habit, like swearing.
5 It just has to be stopped. You cannot allow people to
6 name call. The destruction to your boundaries is
7 enormous from such a silly habit.

8 Emotional intimidation, which means by having
9 feelings so fearful or angry that the other one is
10 scared, that the fear is dysfunctional. Or the other
11 end of that spectrum is threatening departure. I'm
12 going to desert you. It's okay to get a divorce, but to
13 threaten to get a divorce is not okay. You just don't
14 do it. You call a lawyer and you do it. But in the
15 middle of a fight, to say it is an incredible high
16 energy red herring. Very destructive to the
17 relationship and doesn't serve the fight at all.

18 Hitting, damage, cruelty, button-pushing,
19 name-calling, emotional intimidation, and the final one
20 and the most complex and difficult one is saying no to
21 hooks. I'll define what hooks are. A hook is a no-win
22 drama. You'll have to think of your own. I'll give one
and you'll see what I mean. It's when, no matter what
the parties say, it comes out the same way every time
and it's always bad. One person says poor me, I've been

1 victimized by so-and-so. The other one says no, you're
2 not really victimized. I think you can do something
3 about it. You don't have to worry about it. I think we
4 can fix it. Oh, no. Stop it. I've done all I can and
5 you're picking on me now. Listen, if you stop whining
6 about it, you'd be less upset because you could do
7 something about it. See now, you're picking on me.
8 See, everybody, you, too. I thought I could get more
9 from you.

10 That conversation never ends. It just starts
11 at a place and ends at a place. Now you may have your
12 own versions, I'm sure, of that, but that's a no-win
13 hook. How do you say no to those?

14 Well, saying no to a hook means recognizing
15 that there are certain childhood patterns that came from
16 a very distorted understanding of how the world works
17 that you took on when you were two or three or four
18 years old, based on the total sample of your family as
19 it was at that moment. You developed some habits. And
20 when, as an adult, we're in our most needy needs, most
21 in need of caring, that's when our most primitive
22 childlike behavior tends to manifest itself. Too
exhausted to do much more creative with it.

Now as a child, you might have had very busy
parents, and your busy parents might have responded the

1 fastest when you whined, or when you attacked them or
2 when you attacked a sibling, or when you had a disaster
3 in your life, or when you totally collapsed. Or maybe
4 you tried all of these and they never responded anyway.

5 But whatever happened, you got into the
6 childhood habit of asking when you're needy, it emerges
7 unconsciously as an adult in need, and it comes at your
8 partner like a hook. You're projecting on them a
9 certain how they're going to respond, an agenda for them
10 to follow right in.

11 You get hooked by the whining or the
12 attacking, you know? And you don't want to give in and
13 give it because you don't like what's happening to you
14 right now.

15 Well, if you accept the hook and feel gotten
16 by it, what happens is you feel justified in being cruel
17 back. Or you kill the whole relationship and walk out.
18 But in either case, once you start falling for hooks,
19 it's only a downward spiral to cooler and cooler
20 relationships.

21 The way to say no to any of these -- no to
22 hitting, no to hooks -- is the same. It's an attitude.
It's a spirit. It's a not getting hit. It's a not
fighting back. It's a not running away. It is a
standing aside and a reaching out. It's saying, "You

1 are whining and attacking and thinking I'm the most
2 awful person in the world. I would like to support you
3 right now. I would not like to be the victim of your
4 animosity. I would like to be the supporter of how
5 you're feeling right now and what you need right now."
6 Being able to step aside. That is a skill which I think
7 is very, very learnable and very painful when not done
8 that way.

9 Let me summarize again. The stages of
10 relationship-building require some specific skills to
11 create relationships that enhance and enchant. Step 1
12 is being yourself -- your feelings, thoughts and will,
13 even in the presence of others. Step 2 is creating a
14 space. Step 3 is saying no, stepping aside and reaching
15 out. No to hitting, damage, cruelty, button-pushing,
16 name-calling, intimidation, hooks, stepping aside and
17 being there.

18 Step 4 is negotiating good agreements. These
19 are the volitional acts. These are like how we would
20 want it to be, the positive things we would want. I
21 believe that the following conditions are not just
22 aesthetic draperies here. I think that in addition,
what we're talking about are essential conditions for
the human spirit to thrive in a relationship.
Relationships, I think, struggle until these following

1 these are present. I'd like you to check the list to
2 see if you think they're present for you.

3 The first one is honoring agreements. I think
4 there are broken agreements continually in a
5 relationship until there is absolute certainty that when
6 you make an agreement with the other person, they're
7 going to honor it. That is the basis of trust.
8 Knowing I can make an agreement and you're going to honor
9 it is the basis of trust. It becomes the foundation for
10 other things. They also say, I can count on you.

11 Why such blow-ups when somebody is a few
12 minutes late? I believe it's because we had an
13 agreement, we broke the agreement. It's not the ten
14 minutes. It's the fact of: is this an indicator that
15 you are fundamentally untrustworthy, that you don't
16 think I count? It's that holy war energy that makes
17 that ten minutes late so upsetting. We need to first
18 work out honoring agreements.

19 The second one is truthfulness. Never
20 intending to deceive the other. I can count on the fact
21 that there is no intention to deceive. I can trust that
22 you are going to be a good mirror of reality for me,
because you are going to reflect back with intention to
tell the truth.

 The third is kindness. Is there ever an

1 excuse for you to choose to treat me like an object?
2 Refuse to see through my eyes? Refuse aid when I'm
3 suffering? Is there any condition which you could not
4 be kind to me? I believe that illnesses are major
5 challenges to a relationship, and when couples go
6 through an illness, or any two people go through an
7 illness -- parent, child, friends -- when you go through
8 an illness, there is a certain coming together. There
9 has been a vulnerability, and there has been someone
10 standing there with you that brings you spiritually
11 closer than any other one thing that I know about. I
12 think it has to do with testing out and being really
13 comfortable and strong in your sense of kindness.

14 Fairness -- that's about taking turns, with
15 time and with opportunity. Are you ultimately going to
16 be self-serving? Is this relationship about me serving
17 you or is this relationship about mutual serving? I
18 think that is tested over and over again until there's
19 certainty.

20 Fifth, finally, encouragement. Is it your
21 ambition that I am all that I can be, even if it means
22 some changes for you?

I believe that these five -- agreements,
truth, kindness, fairness and encouragement -- are
necessary and difficult because arise in a relationship

1 (?) because these are missing, and as missing things,
2 the couple of consciously or unconsciously trying to
3 negotiate these kinds of agreements to make their space
4 safe. This struggle to make these agreements creates
5 stress and conflict. Once negotiated, the bond between
6 people I think is very powerful, because you feel safety
7 in each other's presence, and therefore you can take the
8 emotional risks that letting go and leading enchantments
9 requires.

10 The fifth step is a process of trading for
11 what you want. I think one of the important ideas to
12 get rid of, and I find it a hard one to get rid of, is
13 that someone owes me love or someone owes me an
14 enchantment. And there's a childhood sense that comes
15 out of a family, that the family is going to care for us
16 free and out of their generosity.

17 Now some of us have enjoyed that through our
18 whole lives, a sense of parents who truly care for us
19 out of their generosity. And some people only
20 experience it for a matter of weeks or months. But
21 nobody gets out of infancy unless there was somebody or
22 bodies or cares for them generously. That experience,
that yearning for the womb, womb nirvana, stays with
us. A state of relationship where I am taken care of
effortlessly. It is owed me for being.

1 Getting over that notion is an important step
2 in trading. Recognizing that to be in a relationship
3 where gifts are generous again is the culmination of a
4 relationship that has to be worked out very carefully
5 over years and years with an enormous amount of trust
6 before you're going to get back to that generosity again.
7 In the meantime you've got to start a relationship with
8 something far more simple, basic, and that is trading.
9 And this briefly I think is the trading process.

10 The first step is if you're counting on
11 getting what you want without asking for it, you don't
12 have to get clear about what you want. A baby just goes
13 AAAAAAHHHHH and everybody else figures out whether it's
14 food or dryness or sleep or whatever. So we go into
15 adulthood without the habit. So the equivalent of
16 AAHHHH is just complaining about how everything is not
17 quite good enough.

18 So the first thing is being able to take those
19 complaints and unpack them and find out beneath the
20 complaint is something you want. And that's a lot
21 harder to do than it looks. You say take my complaint,
22 find a want, you ask for that -- well, I really don't
 want that. It really is an art form to figure out what
 do I really want? It's easier to complain. So the
 first step is figuring out, what do you want?

1 The second is creating that space I talked
2 about for asking. Not asking on the run, but having a
3 time, a beginning, an ending, an attitude, a mood.
4 Asking is serious business because it's an important
5 negotiation that's going on, and until you're really
6 good at it, you can't do it on the run. Maybe you never
7 can.

8 Ask and listen is the third step. Ask and
9 listen seven times. When we ask for something and
10 assume we just ought to get it, when a person says
11 anything other than, "Oh, I'd love to", there's an
12 experience of rejection, and we often go away,
13 disappointed or mad or hurt or upset or I'll never ask
14 again, or whatever. But the truth is that you have to
15 be willing to ask and listen about seven times in order
16 for that asking to truly have happened. Incredibly, as
17 you figure out what you want, you may not exactly
18 express clearly what you want, or the other person may
19 not hear it clearly. There's going to be a whole raft
20 of questions that you need to respond to in order to
21 have that asked. And then there's a lot of anxieties
22 about it. This is your choice, what you want to do.
Anxieties about it that the other person will come up
with. They need to articulate those and you have to
offer some reassurance. And unless you go through those

1 steps, you're not completely asking.

2 Finally, the other person -- you know, they're
3 leading a life, too. They may want something else. You
4 have to find out what they want so that you can do some
5 trading. Maybe you can do both, one now, one later.
6 Maybe not. But there needs to be some trading.

7 I believe that that's the process, and
8 learning not to quit when there is no immediate yes, and
9 learning to ask and listen these seven times I think
10 takes some spiritual strength to stay in that place of
11 "Yes, I want". And I think it comes only with practice.

12 Step 6 is respecting feelings. Feelings are
13 what give life meaning. Nothing feels very important or
14 worth living for even unless it generates some feeling
15 -- a joy, a hope, an embarrassment, a fear, a hurt, an
16 anger. Then, when it has that feeling attached, then it
17 draws a powerful energy and it's important. Feelings
18 either are creative in a relationship or destructive in
19 a relationship.

20 There isn't time today to go into any depth
21 about feelings. I just want to make this one
22 observation about respecting feelings. In
relationship-building courses when we're talking about
feelings, I ask people about feelings and everybody now
is enlightened enough to know that feelings are good and

1 men and women both want to be able to experience all of
2 their feelings. But when men and women meet in
3 subgroups -- men together and women together -- and they
4 talk about feelings, the truth is that what women talk
5 about is that they'd like their men to have feelings but
6 their anger scares the hell out of them, and their
7 crying leads them kind of "Gee, I ought to like this,
8 but I don't know that I do."

9 And men feel, not knowing what to do with a
10 weeping woman or a screaming woman. That actually the
11 yelling, the weeping, the anger and the fear, we don't
12 know exactly how to respond to that in a constructive
13 way, particularly from not an angry parent or an angry
14 sibling or an angry child, but an angry equal other with
15 power. That is learned behavior, knowing how to respond.

16 I believe that beneath our struggles in our
17 relationships, there are some basic issues that I've
18 been talking about, some basic skills that we're
19 attempting to learn, and that we tend to share similar
20 -- you can tell me later if I've been talking only about
21 me and Nancy -- you can tell me if you think that some
22 of this that I'm talking about is shared material. But
I think that we succeed in learning from our struggles
if we pay attention to being yourself, creating the
space, saying no by stepping aside, negotiating these

1 good agreements, trading for what you want with seven
2 times asking and listening, respecting feelings by
3 appropriate response and expression.

4 Then we're up to stage 7 here, step 7, which
5 is that you're equipped to do this leading and letting
6 go to enchantments.

7 My goal today was to outline a theory of
8 relationship-building that's being built over the last
9 few years, and will be presented in a series of
10 workshops and support groups which are going to begin
11 next September. And with the help of some friends, I'm
12 hoping some day maybe some of this stuff will be
13 published.

14 I hope that you've picked out a useful idea
15 from this, but I'm always eager for reaction and
16 addition and thoughts. I'm much more of a synthesizer
17 than I am a creator, and I appreciate and need your
18 input to this. But I don't know of anything more
19 precious than people learning to spiritually enhance
20 each other in the process of relating. And I want to
21 say that I am very pleased to be able to be serving a
22 group that pays attention to that kind of thing.

 If you'd like to know more about it, as it's
developing through the summer, I'm leaving this pad here
and you can put your name on it and I'll make sure

1 you're informed. Thank you for the time. I appreciate
2 it.

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