

How to Develop Meaningful Relationships

Of the myriad relationships we develop in our lives, few are truly meaningful. Meaningful relationships, however, are an important component of a fulfilled life. A meaningful relationship is comprised of three separate but synchronous components: Body, Mind, and Spirit. Before attempting to connect with another person on each of these three levels, we must first form the Body-Mind-Spirit connection within ourselves. Understanding the Body-Mind-Spirit in yourself helps to understand the universality of mankind. One way to achieve this unity is through meditation. This promotes compassion and acceptance, two important components of a meaningful relationship. Once you have developed harmony among the three components of yourself, you can give of yourself to others.

A relationship built at the body level is driven by appearance, lust, and the reward of sexual gratification. Relationships that operate at this base level are superficial, and a relationship focused on physical pleasure struggles to develop further. A relationship at the base physical level does not encompass the compassion, understanding, and empathy needed for a meaningful relationship to thrive. Conversely, a relationship built at the mental level is driven by desire for respect, power, privilege, security, and intellectual stimulation. A relationship formed at the mental level is much deeper than a relationship formed at the physical level because it

promotes an exchange of feelings and ideas and offers a lasting reward. A relationship built on the spiritual level is characterized by empathy. It is possible for a compassionate and accepting person to have a spiritual but not mental relationship with another person if he or she feels strongly moved to care for that person with no expectation of reward. The most meaningful and rewarding relationships are comprised of a healthy balance of these three components.

A solid foundation for understanding is a key component to building a meaningful relationship. This understanding is formed at the mental level when you achieve the perspective-taking component of empathy. Empathy for another person can be described as imagining another person's condition in such a manner that you understand their perspective and can analyze their emotions without feeling them. Empathy can be learned first at the mental level by listening to the other person. This listening leads to understanding and reduces stress in the other person, lowering their burden. This act of giving and sharing is crucial to the relationship. If one member of the relationship is a "taker", the relationship will be unbalanced. In order to prevent this, focus first on yourself. If you can develop yourself to desire only to serve and give, then you can understand yourself and what you bring to the relationship.

Empathy can also be described as contagious emotion, when you involuntarily imitate the emotions of the other person and thereby experience the same emotions. This is empathy at the spiritual level. A truly meaningful relationship develops when the mental and spiritual components of empathy form a mixed component whereby you

can understand the emotions of the other person and feel moved to help that person. Empathy is also an important aspect of forgiveness, because we forgive others to the extent that we feel empathy for them. If we can take the perspective of another person, experience their emotions, and understand that no one is perfect, then we can forgive them. When you feel empathy for another person, that person becomes included in yourself and thereby in caring for the other person you are actually caring for yourself. Thus the two bodies are merged and a meaningful relationship is developed.

To summarize, you cannot expect to form a meaningful relationship with others until you have a clear understanding of your own Body-Mind-Spirit trinity. Once you understand that the Body is subordinate to the Mind and Spirit, you can apply this knowledge to your relationships with others. Know that the exchange of ideas and thoughts is one key component of a meaningful relationship and that empathy is another. To maintain meaningful relationships, practice taking the perspective of those around you and desire only to serve others.