

---

## Creating Relationships that Work

---

By Dr Petra Weldes

Biologically, psychologically, and emotionally - whether we tend to work alone or love being in the midst of a crowd - as humans, we need belonging and are designed for connection. You'd think that because this is so innate to our being, that finding and being in relationships that are loving, mutually supportive, and fulfilling would be easy. But no, the irony is how challenging having a great relationship actually is.



Photo by Karen Fry

What makes it so difficult and what can we do about it?

Having had my own string of - spectacularly failed, boring and going nowhere, and now growing and fulfilling (hallelujah!) - relationships, I believe that the key to relationships that work is a deep commitment to *paradox*. What do I mean by paradox? To me, a paradox is when two apparently opposite ideas are still simultaneously true. Which is completely annoying because our brains like things to be in neat boxes of either/or. "Either you love me, or you don't." "Either I get my way, or you get your way." "Either we are on the same page, or we are not compatible."

To have relationships that work we actually need to mature into the ability to hold the paradoxes. This means to both accept and navigate the tensions that are inherent in relationship. It reminds me of one of my favorite quotes, by Osho, "*Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived.*" The either/or tension inherent in relationships isn't a problem we need to solve; rather, it's a mystery of surprise and possibility to be experienced and lived.

I believe the most fundamental paradoxes that we have to manage in a great relationship are:

- Oneness and Difference
- Inner and Outer Reality
- You, Me, and Us

### **Oneness and Difference**

Isn't falling in love the most amazingly wonderful experience? Here's this person who understands us, is so like us it's uncanny, and has all the qualities we've ever dreamed of having in a partner. We're surprised at how perfect they are and feel like they are a match made in heaven. Until somewhere between 8 and 18 months, if we are in a serious relationship, and something changes. Gradually we are aware of the fact that we don't agree on everything and we don't actually see or feel everything in the same way.

I find that this often shows up in statements like “I can’t believe you think that!” or “How could you not understand how I feel?” and eventually it becomes “I just really don’t understand you.” What?!? But you were so perfect! How did we get here?

That lovely falling in love part is a deep recognition of our Oneness. There is a vibration that our heart and soul tunes into with our beloved. Oneness is the fundamental nature of the Universe. As part of Life, we are connected to all Life, and it’s in our relationships where we discover and explore that connection. We experience the inherent reality of our shared needs as humans and our shared desires as spiritual beings. As we are drawn into a primary relationship, there is a deep sense of congruence with this particular soul, an inner resonance between us.

Really learning to understand our shared needs and impulses creates a firm foundation from which to build a relationship. Talking about our hopes and dreams, what we like and find funny, the road we’ve traveled to get to this moment in time, these are all ways to express our shared sense of who we are and who we want to be as a couple. This requires leisurely and safe space and time in which we can vulnerably share our deepest desires with each other.

But as I said, over time we begin to also realize that we are not actually the same. We are unique, with different pasts, interests, and ways of approaching life. This is where the old cliché “opposites attract” really begins to show up. There are so many ways we discover that we are different – one likes to talk and the other tends to be more quiet; one likes adventure and the other leans toward safety and security; one likes to dream big ideas and the other wants to dive into details; one likes philosophical conversations and the other likes to work with their hands; one is laid back and the other a bit more enthusiastic and high strung.

Without a framework for understanding and skills for communicating, this is often where relationships begin to drift into unpleasant waters. We want to go back to that place of Oneness so we try to make the other person into someone just like us. We wonder what happened to that simpatico we had been experiencing or we simply become resentful of our partners way of being and doing their life.

Viva la Difference! The paradox is the way the Oneness of Life shows up in diversity! Like no two flowers or snowflakes are alike, neither are we. To begin to hold this paradox differently, what if we simply decided to admire the mystery that is our beloved? Finding the beauty in the unique way our partner shows up is a powerful gift of love. Don’t we all want to be seen for who we are? Don’t we all want to be loved without having to constantly try to fit in, be normal, or be like everyone else. When we truly work to give this gift to our partner, amazing things happen. They feel seen, heard, loved, and appreciated.

In my relationship, when there’s a task we need to accomplish I tend to be very focused. I want to know what the priorities are and then get on with it. My beloved tends to like to talk about the idea of things. When we are engaged in accomplishing a task, she often wants to focus on the people involved instead. This can be really annoying. I sometimes wish for her to be more focused on what we need to do than on the people we run into along the way. She likes to chat with every clerk, waitress, person in line, and can easily get distracted.

What if these very differences are part of the underlying attraction that has brought us together? From a spiritual growth perspective, we realize that the very way our partner has come to annoy us, is actually the very thing we need to have a little bit more of to grow us. Valuing our differences, seeing them not as

problems to be solved, but as the beauty of our differences invites an entirely different kind of dynamic into our relationships.

I tend to be introverted, which means I don't always love to be around lots of people. It drains my energy. However, I've learned that it's needed for my work, so I've learned how to do it. It still drains me after a while. What I love is teaching and speaking that brings about deep personal transformation, oh, and of course, I love writing! My beloved, on the other hand, feeds off the energy of people. She's never met a stranger, can talk to anyone, and is truly gifted in creating connection. This is a huge asset to our growing spiritual community. She remembers to call people individually and loves to be out in the crowd talking and connecting. She is terrific at creating partnerships with outside groups and loves going to events and programs where socializing and conversations creates amazing connection and opportunity. With our different ways of engaging with people, we are a dynamic team.

We have learned that the very traits that make us so different are the very things we each bring to our work and life together. She draws me out into relationships and conversations that I might otherwise miss, and I help her stay focused on accomplishing projects and getting done what we said needed to be done.

Finding the gifts in our differences requires patience, understanding, communication skills, and a willingness to allow the other to be who they are, while allowing ourselves to be drawn out a bit more. This means sometimes my partner lets me help her (and us) stay on task and sometimes I let her pull me out of my introverted shell. Now our differences help each of us become more well-rounded humans and more fully expressed spiritual beings.

### **Inner and Outer Reality**

The next paradox that both confronts us and grows us is the fact that a lot of what we experience in the world is actually a reflection and projection of our own inner reality. We bring our past into every relationship - all the previous hurts, bad experiences, and unhealthy coping mechanisms. And, of course, so does our partner. How easily we become triggered by something our partner does or says. You'll recognize this when you think "Oh, you're just like... my mother, that previous person I was with, my father, etc." Or you think, "I can't believe this is happening again. I thought I wasn't going to have this problem with you." (even though I've had this problem in every relationship I've been in!)



*Photo by Karen Fry*

Relationships that work are a perfect laboratory for us to discover and clean up all the ways we engage in life that don't work. A good relationship is better than therapy! You don't just talk about things, you both actually get in the muck and mire of it all and make your way through. This means owning what's yours and letting your partner own what's theirs. It means learning to see the things you are

projecting on to each other and talking through unhealthy reactions. It means realizing that how you are experiencing life may be more a product of your past more than it is about what's actually going on in the moment.

Developing the communication skills and the willingness to really share in an open and vulnerable way is critical for this to work. In addition, we each have to be willing to work on those underlying coping mechanisms, patterns, and false beliefs that no longer serve (like people pleasing, always needing to be right, letting our insecurities run the show, trying to control everything living our life through our emotions, or never letting anyone know how we are feeling).

The grittiness of our relationship happens when these underlying coping mechanisms, patterns, beliefs about ourselves and others, are activated. We can either make this wrong, bad, and overly painful or we can use it as opportunities for personal growth. I promise you that if it isn't working in your primary relationship, it's also making a mess in other important relationships in your life as well. The great news is there are skills that can be learned, as well as attitudes that can be adopted, to create truly loving relationships. It may be challenging work, but every time one of us grows the relationship grows, too.

Now I want to be clear that this does not include dealing with abuse or neglect. It also doesn't work if both parties aren't willing to work on it – individually, and as a couple. Relationships that work, require attention and commitment. Like a garden, a relationship requires diligent tending. New ideas and ways of behaving need to be planted. They need to be watered and fertilized with sharing, patience, kindness, respect, love, and a mutual desire to work things out.

### **You, Me, and Us**

All of this culminates in the ultimate paradox of a loving, joy-filled, healthy, growing relationship. That paradox is the fact that while we are in a relationship, creating a long-term partnership, we are still always going to be individuals with our own needs and desires. This tension may be the most challenging of all. Being in relationship creates needs and desires, hopes and dreams. Yet these can't completely supersede our individual needs. And vice versa, our individual needs can't always outweigh the needs of our partnership.



Both partners in a relationship must continue to pursue their own individual fulfillment - through work, hobbies, children, volunteering, friends, schooling, community, or creative endeavors. Each partner is growing and maturing in their own unique skills, talents, and interests. It's important that we encourage that in each other. Sometimes it's hard to take the time or ask for what we need in this regard. It can be equally difficult to give another the space and support they require. At the same time, we have this third entity, our relationship, which also needs space and support. That means we have to spend time on growing it as diligently as we grow ourselves. We have to provide space and support to the needs and desires of the *us* that is our relationship. Exploring the dynamic "give and take" between these 3 can feel like a tug-of-war. It can also feel like a dance.

This is a delicate dance we do over time. Sometimes it's his time to go to school and your time to work and support. Sometimes it's your time to catch your breath, take some down time, and she gets to pick up the slack. The give and take of our individual needs with the needs of our home and life together is the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly dance. Learning the steps of the dance takes practice, but once we are confident in them, whirling around the dance floor of Life, as a couple, is a truly Joyous experience.

## Creating Relationships that Work

One of the most challenging things I've had to learn in my history of relationships is that love simply isn't enough to create a relationship that work. It certainly is necessary as a foundation, but it won't get us through the rough patches. Developing unconditional love when we didn't experience it ourselves, learning to communicate when we grew up in dysfunctional homes, and becoming self-aware when all we witnessed was blaming and shaming takes effort and diligent practice. The good news is that these things can all be learned, and tools can be applied to make the processes of growing together fruitful and satisfying.

There are many places to begin. You can start with communication skills, self-awareness tools, personal growth applications, or intentional living. These are some of the things you can explore in therapy or with spiritual coaches. You can also immediately learn and apply tangible tools through e-courses, online opportunities and spiritual coaching offered on our website - [csldallas.org](http://csldallas.org).

Happy creating! May your relationships grow into joyous expressions of deep love and profound connection.

