

A Journey Into the Heart of Relationship

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*Sometimes life drags me
kicking and screaming
to precisely where I truly want to be.*

About SPiBR.org LLC

Founded in 2007, SPiBR.org LLC is an international consultancy focused on strategic relationship managers. We are about the practical application of spiritual (relationship-deepening) principles in strategically-important business relationships and ecosystems. Our professional services include coaching, training, and consulting services for individuals and teams. We are headquartered in Santa Fe, NM, USA.

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INTRODUCTION

This is about my journey. It is a true story, full of intrigue:

- Drug addiction,
- Attempted suicide and death,
- Living with disabilities,
- Deep seated fears: failure and success, being delusional, being unacknowledged and unappreciated,
- Intimate relationships: between male and female, between masculine and feminine, between mind and heart,
- Forgiveness and trust,
- Spirituality and religion.

This document is about how life has compelled me to voyage deeper and deeper into relationship, in all its forms, ultimately into relationship's heart.

Why Did I Write This?

What you are about to read is my reflection on the past four decades of my life. One of my motivations for writing this is to answer two questions I am often asked, "Why are you so focused on bringing spirituality into business relationships? How did you get to this place in your life?" As you read on, I trust that you will find the answers to these questions.

You might wonder if writing this has been cathartic for me. In many ways, it has. It has helped *heal* the relationship between my head and my heart. It helped me see my life from a more *holistic* and *loving* perspective. Writing this has also allowed me to understand how my life's experiences fit together, for my good and for the good of others.

My hope is that this journey brings healing into relationships of all types, for everyone it touches.

*May this expression of my heart
encourage you to become who you are meant to be.*

Defining Relationship

The word "relationship" is often used in describing an interpersonal romantic relationship (e.g., a marriage, partnership or dating). With that definition in mind, I often hear someone say, "I am not in a relationship," as if relationship was something you may or may not be *in*.

I am using the word in a very general way. I use relationship to describe the "connective tissue" that *lives* between people, between organizations, between companies, between countries, throughout humanity, with nature, between us and the Universe, and even between ideas (e.g., in important conversations or when negotiating).

In the broadest and truest sense, it can be said that we are *always* in relationship, with everything and everyone. The point of this document is to emphasize that all we *have* is relationship. It even makes the point that all we *are* is relationship. Relationship is *all* inclusive and it is *who* we are.

My Evolving Relationship with Relationship

During this journey, my relationship with *relationship* has morphed and grown. At first, I neither saw nor acknowledged relationship. Then, I saw relationship as a major source of problems. Next, I made a leap to the realization that relationship is the source of *all* creativity, and to the understanding that the *deepening of relationship* is my *purpose* in life. Finally, I now actually see relationship as my *identity*. This last step may seem extreme. Read on!

I have also come to realize that true communication or *dialogue* is at the heart of relationship. Dialogue is the means and the end. *Dialogue in relationship* is how and where we fulfill our purpose; it is how we return "home."

This document is a deep dive into relationship, into its heart. It describes *why* we should make that dive, and *how* we can do it.

Experience Based on Depth and Intensity

Because of my professional experiences, this document is strongly oriented toward individuals who establish, develop and manage inter-company relationships (i.e., strategic alliances – long-term value-creating relationships). These are the most intense, challenging and rewarding relationships in business.

The lessons learned during my journey are also derived from the intensity of my interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the insights I will share can be applied into any and all relationships.

We are all interested in:

*Long-term
value-creating
relationships.*

Over the past few decades, I have discovered that the deeper and more meaningful the relationship (e.g., marriage, partnership, strategic alliance), the greater the possibility for growth, transformation and creativity. This is true on an individual level as well as collectively – that is, in interpersonal, as well as inter-organizational relationships.

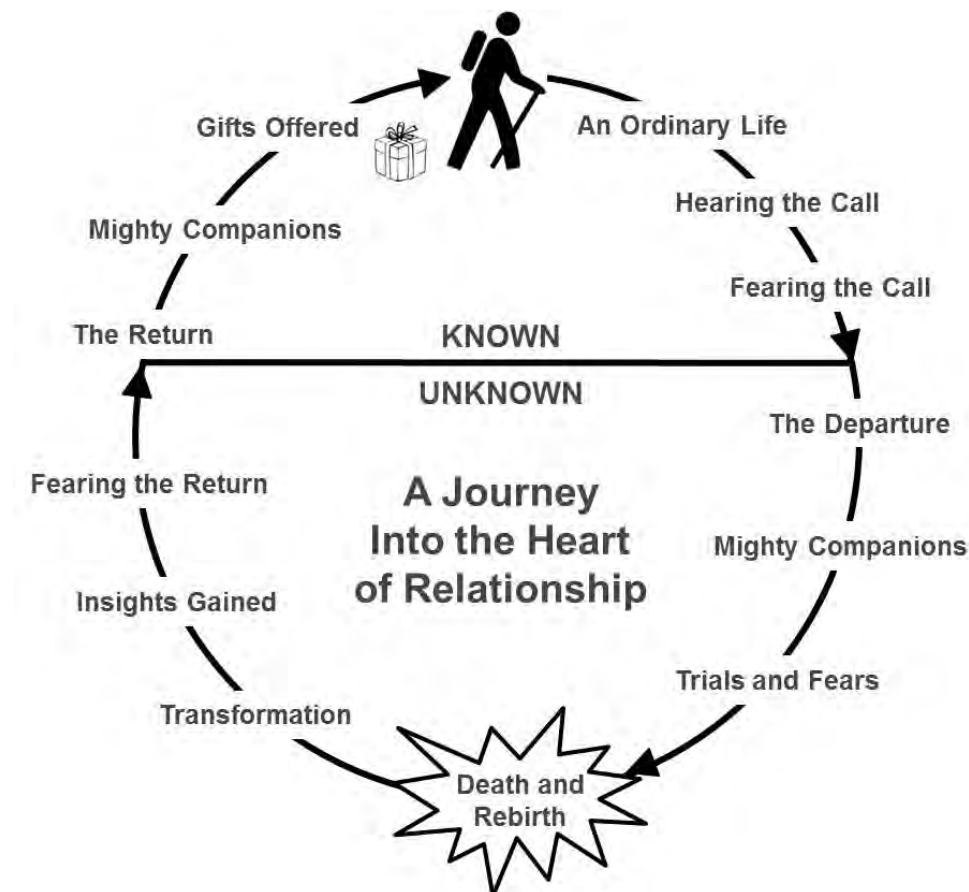
It is important to realize that relationship exists between people, between organizations (e.g., companies and countries), between a person and an idea, between a person and his/her Higher Power (a.k.a., God, the Universe), between us and nature, and within an individual (e.g., between their heart and mind).

All we have is relationship.

I hope you enjoy the ride. I hope you experience a journey of your own while you read on ...

Your Travel Guide for this Journey

I acknowledge the work of Joseph Campbell in defining [The Hero's Journey](#). I am using it as a model for this article, modifying it in order to better fit my personal journey. [\[illustration\]](#)



A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

- Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

This document represents my journey, as authentically as I can. You might notice that the flow may seem to be disjointed and at times repetitive. This is because I have consciously chosen to use an experientially-based structure (based on a *journey*) rather than a strictly chronologically-based approach. I have also chosen not to *segment* my life, by having the main sections in the document be Personal, Work, and Spiritual; one of the earliest lessons I learned on this journey was to not segment life. My intent is to share with you my journey and its lessons.

An early reader of this document wrote, "I felt like I just took a tour inside your heart and mind, seeing all the things that matter to you, seeing how you perceive your world, your work, your relationships, and your life. Your spirituality permeates every aspect. It feels kind of like witnessing someone else's dream, because it is so circuitous and meandering. Themes are developed for a time and then the focus shifts to something else; some themes come up again and again, like the recurring contents of a dream. Sometimes your descriptions are heartfelt and personal; sometimes they are conceptual and conclusive. Sometimes your writing tells a story; sometimes it captures meaning in bulleted outlines or charts. This document is as multifaceted and multidimensional as your whole life has been. It is clearly a work of love, just as your whole life has been."

AN ORDINARY LIFE

I had been living an ordinary and successful life. Sue and I had been married for 35 years. We are the parents of four children, two boys and two girls. A unique aspect of our family is that two of our children have a progressive, body-destroying and life-shortening disability (more about that later). [\[illustration\]](#)

*Home and family have always
been hugely important to me.*



This made the changes required by this journey to be extraordinarily difficult. It sometimes took me a decade or more to finally make a necessary change. (I've recently come to see myself as a slow spiritual learner, although I am intelligent.)

Twenty Years at Hewlett-Packard

I worked for Hewlett-Packard (HP) for 20 years, mostly in strategic alliances (value-creating collaborative-R&D relationships between companies). Some of my more notable contributions and accomplishments were:

- In 1989, the establishment of a collaborative-R&D and co-resident strategic alliance with US West (a major telecommunications company in the western US, later called Qwest Communications). This alliance created significant improvement in an HP product and in US West's customer billing system.
- In 1997, the establishment of HP's [corporate-level strategic alliance with Microsoft](#) (valued in many \$Bs).
- In 2005, leading a [\\$300 million "impossible" deal](#) within a \$1.2 billion alliance with SAP, in Germany (the third largest software company in the world), announced in 2006 (shortly after I left HP).

Religion and Spirituality

My spiritual/religious life has always been very important to me. Throughout our marriage, I had been active in our religion, ultimately serving at a high level within its organization. I loved our church's strong sense of community; it was like a huge extended family. This sense of community made my ultimate decision to leave it very difficult.

Spirituality is synonymous with relationship.

Based on experiences during this journey, I now define spirituality as the *deepening of relationship*: with my Self, with others, and with everything else (i.e., the Universe, Higher Power, God, nature). (Note: I will use capitalized Self in this document, when appropriate, to describe, my true self, higher self, or divine self.)

Spirituality can help us understand the fundamental principles in relationships of every type: interpersonal, inter-corporate, or internal (in your relationship with your Self).

I like to describe my spirituality as being *open* and *growing*. This leaves space for unseen biases or blind spots that sometimes can cause me to be closed-minded. We all need others to help us see our blind spots.

I regard my two "spiritual universities" as: (1) recovering from drug addiction and (2) dealing with my children's progressive disability.

Other important influences in my life have been my longtime study of *A Course in Miracles* (since 2003), *A Course of Love* (since early 2014), and I have been an active participant in Twelve Step recovery, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). I have been "clean" from alcohol and drugs since 2000.

In my life and in my writings, I am very clear about the spiritual principles, or “simple truths” which are important to me. Sometimes, my bold clarity, coupled with a deep passion for life, might be misinterpreted as zealotry or dogmatism, to which I am strongly opposed.

Throughout this document I will suggest some ideas that you too might want to explore. You have the truth within you, so you will know whether these ideas are true for you or not. Be true to yourself.

“Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking.”
- Steve Jobs

There are a few other aspects of my life that are important for you to understand, before I begin sharing my journey with you.

I Was Never Chosen

When I was young, I was always the very last person chosen, whenever it was time to “choose up teams.” This was primarily due to my lack of depth perception; my eyes do not work together. I am horrible in sports where I am expected to throw or catch a ball – like in football, basketball or baseball – the predominately male-oriented sports. I dreaded the inevitable embarrassment that would well up inside of me, whenever it was time to be chosen based on athletic ability.

This experience drove me to excel in competitive swimming – a sport that didn't require throwing or catching balls. It drove me to be “part of,” to be a valued member of a team. I have often felt a compulsion to not only be a valued member of a team, but to be the *most* valued member in any group.

Raised in a Competitive Family

I was the youngest of four boys. We were all successful competitive swimmers, state champions, and record holders. Two of my brothers were All-American. I was expected to do even better. But, in college I got distracted by alcohol, drugs and partying.

In retrospect, I realize that being competitive and winning was my way of trying to fit in. More than winning, I wanted to be “part of.” Actually, more than being part of, I wanted to be loved.

Around our family's dinner table, we talked mostly about swimming. We rarely had substantive in-depth conversations about our personal lives. The pool was our life. Winning was how we were acknowledged, and how we were “loved” (as best as our parents knew how to love). And so, finding fault with our swimming was deemed to be a good thing; it helped us improve. For years, I thought finding fault was a good thing. Fault-finding became my purpose in life – finding my own faults and finding yours, too. I felt it was important for me to tell you what was wrong with you! It has taken me a long time to understand that finding fault is a truly problematic way to live.

As a freshman in high school, I was fearful of not “lettering” (i.e., getting a letter jacket) – of not being an acceptable member of the team. That would have been a huge embarrassment for a Kittel boy! The desire to be “part of” drove me to excel. I ended up winning state in the longest distance event of the state swim meet. This was only the second time that a freshman had won state in Utah. My natural desire for acceptance and love ended up driving me to overachieve.

I remember one swim meet in particular. It was with an arch rival. Both teams were very competitive, and it was a very close meet. After the last event, it was announced that the other team had won, by just a few points. Our team had been favored to win, so the other team went crazy with celebration. I became “caught up” in their celebration and decided to join in, jumping in the pool with our arch rivals.

When our coach saw what I had done, he was furious. "What are you doing celebrating our loss?" I wasn't celebrating our loss; I was simply joining in celebration. Just then, the scorekeeper announced that there had been an error in his calculation, and our team had actually won the meet. My coach was now even more furious. Our team did not celebrate; we just left the pool. In retrospect, this event made clear to me that my desire to be "part of" was actually greater than my need to win.

I can, however, easily slip back into a competitive mindset, where I think being "better than" is an acceptable way to be part of, appreciated, and loved. This is because, for such a long time, it seemed like being the best was the only way to be acceptable.

The following statement is only a half-joke; sometimes people laugh nervously when they first hear it. Then they go silent as they realize it might apply to them, too. "I am into competitive spirituality."

There has been a softening of my compulsive competitiveness, as I felt a calling to dive deeper and deeper into relationship. This calling feels like the Universe saying, "I want you on my team, and I have no MVPs (most valuable players). All are highly valued."

There are no MVPs in a relationship.

Drug Addiction

I initially used drugs to feel better and try to fit in. I was using an external and artificial means (drugs and alcohol) to make up for the lack of natural love in my life. Later on, I abused drugs in order to isolate – from you, from God (a.k.a., Higher Power or the Universe) and ultimately from myself. I found my life and myself to be unacceptable, and I wanted to escape from that.

Then, for decades, I struggled to stop using drugs.

I used to think that my drug addiction was unique, and so my recovery would be unique, too. After years of being "terminally unique" (i.e., being willing to die from my uniqueness), I slowly discovered that I suffer from two spiritual disabilities: (a) a strong self-will, and (b) the illusion of intelligence. Self-will and intelligence had worked for me elsewhere in my life; why not in my battle against drug addiction?

Well ... early on, in my attempts to recover, I found myself continuing to relapse, thinking I could *think* my way out of addiction, all by *myself*.

Now, after nearly 17 years of being "clean" from drugs, I have evolved in my understanding of addiction.

*An addiction is anything I use
to avoid facing the truth,
mostly to avoid facing the truth of who I am.*

And most importantly, I have learned that the solution lies in relationships.

Recovery is a WE thing.

Not only can I not recover by myself, I also cannot "think my way out of" addiction. I cannot recover with my mind alone. There is a "WE-ness" (i.e., having open and honest relationships) that needs to be present in my life. And, "WE-ness" is dependent upon having an open and honest relationship between my mind and heart.

As within, so without.

Highly Educated

I am proud of one of the most challenging accomplishments in my life. While working nearly full-time to support our growing family (three children at the time), I graduated magna cum laude with a BS in electrical engineering, specializing in semiconductor physics and VLSI design (integrated circuits – I describe this as "quantum electronics"; it's briefer and it sounds impressive). [\[illustration\]](#)

I am a deep thinker.

I have applied an engineer's approach to the "warm and fuzzy" areas of life (e.g., spirituality, love, God and relationship). This approach has made my journey my journey. Some say I think too much. To which I say, "I think you're right!"



Time

Time is always an interesting topic. It is relevant in my life and in this article.

Spiritually speaking, I am a slow learner, but at least I am "thick headed." I learn slowly but I seem to learn deeply.

I have spent 12 years striving to live a life of purpose. Sometimes it just takes time.

Also, sometimes, life's lessons are delivered over a long period of time, and sometimes, they are delivered in a chronologically disjointed manner. In other words, the actual events conveyed in the telling of my journey may have actually occurred in a different order, or in time spans significantly different than how they appear in the telling of my story.



Depth

I am a deep thinker – in spirituality, relationships and strategic alliances. [\[illustration, below\]](#)

As I reflect upon my journey, I seem to have become a bit of a "mystic." I am a seeker, through deep contemplation and self-surrender.

We will be going deep
Fasten your seatbelt ...

Relationship
Identity
Deep Dialogue
Trust via Confrontation
Empowerment via self-Obsolescence

GP+S Insights. Strategies. Results.

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HEARING THE CALL

*Lessons call us;
they call us
to learn and grow
and return home.*

It seems as though life calls us to take certain paths, the ones that contain the richest lessons for us. Those paths may not always be the most pleasant, but they are definitely the ones that provide us with our greatest personal growth. I can see now that I was being “called” to this journey that I am now describing to you. The calling occurred over a five to ten-year period; from a spiritual perspective, I am often a slow learner, but I do learn deeply.

The Call into Relationship

I started hearing the call into relationship nearly two decades ago (circa 2000). It came from two seemingly independent areas of my life, both of which held potentially powerful lessons for me. For this reason, I initially rejected them. These calls began on the subconscious level and became progressively louder over time and clearer upon reflection.



The Call via Addiction

Given how close I am to addiction (i.e., it is *in me*), it is obvious that it should be a source of my most immediate “call,” bringing with it fundamental lessons, such as you cannot do this alone, and intellect alone is not sufficient. I have discovered that these lessons apply not only to recovery from drug addiction but to life itself. Nothing can be done alone, and nothing worthwhile can be done with the mind by itself.

Throughout most of my life, I have wrestled with alcohol and drug abuse. Then, in October of 2000, I finally realized that I could not solve this problem with my mind *alone* or *all by myself*. I stopped abusing drugs! The importance of inner and outer relationships pervades the Twelve Steps of recovery. The Twelve Steps say that I need to do a fearless and thorough moral inventory of myself; such a moral inventory, by implication, must include other people. Relationships are explicitly worked on in Steps 8 and 9. Furthermore, the word “we” is in every Step and every Tradition of NA. Elsewhere in NA’s Basic Text, it says, “The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel,” and personal recovery is dependent on *unity* (the fellowship’s collective web of relationships).

Recovering from Addiction is All About Relationship

As I see it, the Twelve Steps of recovery, which transforms lives, is all about relationship: with a Higher Power (Steps 1-3, 6, 7, 11), with ourselves (Steps 4-5), with others (Steps 8-10), and with the world around us (Step 12).

In relationship we accomplish the impossible.

While I was in a 28-day drug treatment program, I read *Sermon on the Mount* by Emmett Fox. What I drew from his book is:

*Spirituality is simply about
the deepening of relationship:
with God, self and others.*

And ... it is all one relationship!

Logically, the statement above seems to make no sense. However, empirically (i.e., observing experiences in life), I have noticed that as I deepen my relationship with God (a.k.a., Higher Power or Universe), my relationships with others and with myself also deepen. As I become more comfortable discussing deep issues with others, I become more self-confident. When I deepen any one of these relationships, the other two deepen as well.

Addiction called me into relationship.

The Call via Disability

Two of our four children have Friedreich's Ataxia (FA) – a degenerative neuromuscular disorder. FA slowly destroys the body (not the mind), and eventually it shortens life.

Our oldest child, Aaron, died in late 2010 at the age of 33. Our youngest child, Allie, is currently 25 years old. [\[illustration\]](#)

Given the intensity of the issues that FA brought into our family and into my relationship with my children (all of them, not just those afflicted with FA), it is natural that my relationship with FA has been the birthplace of many of my greatest lessons.

Anger separates us.



My initial reactions toward FA were denial and anger. This was not helpful in two ways. First, it ended up distancing me from our children. Given that FA is an integral part of who they are, my anger toward FA implicitly distanced me from them; they felt my anger. Second, these emotions distanced me from the rich lessons that were in store for me and our family; they isolated me from life.

Lessons Learned from FA

Here are a few of the lessons I learned from my relationship with Friedreich's Ataxia:

- **Confrontation** – This lesson originated in Twelve Step recovery. Unless there is a willingness to deal directly with the truth, that a person is addicted, recovery will never happen. In order for a personal inventory (Step 4) to be effective (i.e., be transformational), it needs to be fearless and thorough.

Likewise, whenever a major issue comes up in our lives (e.g., a disability like FA), it is *a/ways* best to confront that issue head on: face it, accept it, and talk about it clearly and openly. I call this "confrontation" – co-fronting an issue in a relationship.

When we jointly face difficult issues in a relationship, that issue is transcended; it becomes neutralized and we rise above it. Eventually, it can be transformed into a gift, lesson or blessing. Such is the miracle of "shining our light" (focusing our attention) on difficult issues *in* a relationship – focusing our attention, with precision and love on the issue, not on the *other* (another person or an idea); not with judgment, but simply seeking to see, hear and understand.

Listening is an act of love.

- **The Oneness of Family** – Life's most poignant lessons often come out of our darkest days.

When Aaron was in his late-teens, he tried to commit suicide. Eventually he came out of the darkness, living an incredibly joy-filled life that touched hundreds of people around the world.

Years later, I was talking with the mother of a child with FA who was in a similar situation; her child was deeply depressed and suicidal. I described the time when Aaron was in his "dark days," to which she asked, "How did Aaron get out of his dark days?" I couldn't really recall how we emerged from the darkness, so I went and asked this same question of Aaron, to which he replied, "I got out of the darkness when I saw you and Mom get out of it."

The lesson here is that we are tied together in a web of relationships. We fall into darkness or arise into light together. The best thing we can do for another is to strive to keep ourselves moving into the light, bringing up those around us through our proximity to them.

*Oneness is or it isn't;
there is no in between.
What if it is?
What would that mean?*

- **The Power in Community** – In order to help Aaron establish a healthier relationship with FA, therapists suggested that he attend support groups. However, he was not at all interested in that idea. "Why would I get together with a bunch of 'disabled' people?" he asked. At the time, he was still able to walk, and refused to label himself as "disabled." In response to this, Sue and I started a monthly Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) support group in our home (FA is a disease that MDA cares about).

For the first few months, Aaron refused to join the group, choosing instead to isolate in his room. Then, someone from the group went into Aaron's room and personally invited him into the group, and he begrudgingly joined us.

Over time, he engaged in the group's discussions and even participated in the electric wheelchair races we had in the street in front of our home.

This community of individuals carried a clear message: "So your body is falling apart; well ... we're going to enjoy life anyway!" That message was therapeutic, for Aaron and all who attended our gatherings.

*The collective spirit of this community
helped heal the relationship each person had
with their disability.*

- **The River of Life** - The River gave life to my son with FA. River trips gave Aaron's life meaning and literally saved his life. People who go on river trips often speak of that experience with awe and reverence. Lives are changed by spending five days on the river. There, we are forced to disconnect from technology and *connect deeply* with each other. [\[illustration\]](#)



How does that happen? How do river trips change lives? First, some background ... In the spring of 2000, Aaron took us on our first multi-day raft trip, even though he was using a wheelchair at the time.

Just before Aaron's first rafting trip, he told me that he was scared. I tried to reassure him that the rafting company (Splore) was well equipped to help their disabled clients, and that it was going to be okay. He then said, "You don't understand, Dad. I am scared about *you*. Because you often use drugs on our vacations, and that scares me; sometimes I fear for my life!"

I was only a few months clean. But I knew enough to mostly listen, and then to say, "Aaron, I cannot promise you that I won't use drugs on the rafting trip. All I can say is that I didn't use today and have no plans to use tomorrow." To which he replied, "Thank you for not bullshitting me. Thank you for not making a promise that you know you can't keep."

Today, I can say I have been clean for nearly 17 years; I did not use on that river trip or on any other.

Over the next ten years, Aaron went on roughly fifteen raft trips, including twice down the Grand Canyon. [\[illustration: on Aaron's 2nd Grand Canyon trip\]](#)

On the river, we experienced *community*. That's the answer to the question about how river trips change lives. As we sit around the campfire and stare at the stars, we talk about the River's lessons: go with the flow; let the river guide you; life is a river; God is a river; go toward the rapids (i.e., confront the emotionally turbulent difficulties in your life).

My other son, Mike, became a river guide. Over the past decade, he, too, has learned from the River, and he teaches; he continues building *community*. [\[illustration: Allie, Aaron and Mike\]](#)

- **The Present Moment (Now)** - By its very nature, my children's *progressive* disability (FA) has forced me into the present moment. It tells me to be grateful for what is possible today, because my two children with FA will have less physical ability tomorrow.

I am grateful for FA, for my son's life, for his death, and for our river trips. I am grateful.

*Gratitude is the paddle we use
in the river of life,
to draw us closer to one another and
align our will with God's.*

As I see it, the statement above is actually redundant. God's will for us *is* for us to be closer to one another.

The following quote from *A Course in Miracles* describes the miracle that happens when relationships are deep and authentic, when we confront difficult issues in our relationships. It describes what happens in our relationship with a disability, whether it's physical (like FA) or spiritual (like addiction). It describes how my life has been transformed in relationship. The following quote was in Aaron's email salutation for the last six months of his life.

*"What seemed once to be a special problem,
a mistake without a remedy,
or an affliction without a cure
has been transformed into a universal blessing."*

Our lives are transformed when we let relationship lead us down the River of Life. [\[illustration: Mike, Aaron and another river guide, on their first trip down the Grand Canyon\]](#)



The Call to Germany

I have a deep and somewhat conflicted relationship with Germany.

My great-great grandparents migrated to the US from Germany. Then, my father went back and literally bombed the hell out of his country-of-origin as a pilot during WW II. He flew thirty-two missions in Europe, mostly over Germany. My dad used alcohol in order to deal with his conflicted relationship with Germany and to help obscure the horrors of war; he eventually died from alcoholism. [\[illustration: my dad's WW II bombing map\]](#)



"Kittel" is a fairly common German surname, with roots in both business and spirituality. It is the name of a professional's jacket. It is also the name of a Jewish religious garment. Given my focus, to bring practical spirituality into business, having the name Kittel is an interesting "coincidence."

Friedreich's Ataxia was discovered at the University of Heidelberg in 1863.

From 2003 to 2005, Heidelberg, Germany was my "home away from home," while I led the establishment of a major strategic alliance between HP and SAP.

Called to the Portal

Walldorf, Germany is home for the SAP Partnerport, the largest facility in the world dedicated to business relationships. SAP is the third largest software company in the world (behind Microsoft and virtually tied with Oracle). Most of the world's major high-technology companies gather there for the purpose of partnering, for the purpose of creating value in SAP's business ecosystem. [\[illustration\]](#)



Over a five year period, I worked in the SAP Partnerport on behalf of various HP businesses. My time there concluded with an agreement for a \$300 million project and the establishment of an alliance valued at \$1.2 billion. That alliance had been attempted several times by a number of individuals; it was considered to be impossible.

The impossible became possible via the practical application of spiritual ideas in the [HP/SAP strategic alliance](#).

Lessons Learned from the HP/SAP Alliance

While leading the establishment of this alliance, I had as my objective the application of practical spirituality into the artful science of strategic alliances. This was motivated by the Twelfth Step in NA which suggests that we "practice these principles in all our affairs." From this experiment, I learned the following (each is described more fully at the conclusion of this article):

- **A Creator** – I began to see myself as a creator, a creator of value – not *The* Creator, but a creator.
- **Hear the Voice** – I heard the voice-of-the-collective and used the simple message in that voice to guide me and to guide the alliance. That voice helped us accomplish the impossible, closing a \$300 million deal that had been deemed impossible by everyone else.

- **self-Obsolescence** – I began to realize the amazing and paradoxical empowerment that comes from consciously practicing self-obsolescence – proactively giving away my greatest wisdom and most valuable insights to others. "Giving and receiving are one" is a powerful idea from *A Course of Love*.
- **See the God in You** – I began to experience the power that comes from the embodiment of the transformational idea of "Namaste," especially when dealing with difficult people. Namaste is generally interpreted as "the god in me sees and rejoices in the god I see in you." When I change how I think and feel about another, it changes that relationship, encouraging the other person to also change.
- **The Call for Trust via Confrontation** – I began to explicitly use what I call "confrontation" in order to clear the air, call for trust, and create a more collaborative atmosphere. I actually began to feel excitement when a problem occurred, knowing there is always greatness on the other side.

Be Still at the Gate

In October of 2014, I visited Berlin for the first time. I was drawn to the Brandenburg Gate and to see remnants of the Wall. [\[illustration\]](#)

Built into the Gate is a small room, with a small inconspicuous sign outside saying "Stille Room" (translated as "Silence Room"). I nearly missed it when I first walked past it.

The room was inspired by a similar room at the United Nations, and by Germans on both sides of then-divided Germany. It is funded and staffed by many of the world's religions. They refuse to receive individual donations in the room itself.

The purpose of the Stille Room is to bring peace and quiet to the singular point in the world that most symbolized divisiveness, the Brandenburg Gate. This is a place that had represented division between East and West. [\[illustration\]](#)

On a plaque in the room is "The prayer of the United Nations:"

"Oh Lord, our planet Earth is only a small star in space. It is our duty, to transform it into a planet whose creatures are no longer tormented by war, hunger and fear, no longer senselessly divided by race, colour and ideology. Give us courage and strength to begin this task today so that our children and children's children shall one day carry the name of man with pride."

In retrospect, my visit to the Stille Room in the Brandenburg Gate has turned into one of the most poignant events of my six month stay in Germany. It inspires me to continue to do the impossible, bridging across extraordinarily difficult relationships, in peace. It reminds me of how I describe the role of a strategic alliance manager:

*We do the impossible
with nothing
in the eye of a hurricane.*



FEARING THE CALL

Life was, and still is, calling me into uncharted territory. I was being called to dive deeply into relationship. This stirred up fears, both conscious and unconscious fears.

"Take Your Wildest Dreams and Double Them!"

My last manager at HP, Kirk Wilkinson, gave me incredible encouragement. This was liberating and motivating for me. Paradoxically, his encouragement also stirred up deep-seated fears. To help explain this fear, it is worth noting that I often come up with bold ideas at work. When I had previously suggested a bold idea at HP, my manager at the time would often say, in effect, "That's nice, Joe. Let's take that idea, cut it in half, and think about it for six months."

When I suggested bold ideas to Kirk (e.g., the idea of establishing a new strategic alliance with SAP), he reacted quite differently. In effect, he said, "That's a great idea! Let's double it, and do it tomorrow!"

Over the past decade, I have reflected on Kirk's response to my bold idea. This may sound melodramatic, but it seems as though he exhibited the attributes of a loving and empowering creator (a.k.a., God), who is always telling us:

Take your wildest dreams and double 'em ... today!

This was both exciting and scary.

Fear of Success

I had another set of fears. These revolved around my recovery from drug addiction (which is itself a lifelong journey).

The obvious fear was about relapsing, using drugs again. With only a couple of years clean (not using drugs), I would be living in Heidelberg, Germany, only a few hours from Amsterdam where drugs are easily available, a sort of "nirvana" for an addict who wants to relapse.

A subtler and more significant fear was the fear of success. In the process of working the Twelve Steps, a recovering addict becomes aware of how one can actually sabotage one's own success. Using drugs is just one of the ways that this self-sabotage might occur, but it is not the only way.

We don't feel as though we deserve success. We don't really want to be successful. What would we do if we became really successful?

What is my relationship with success?

In general, an individual can feel as though he/she does not deserve to have life work out for them. The Universe is not really on their side. There is no God. The world is actually against them.

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate,
our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."*

- from *A Return to Love* by Marianne Williamson
(click [here](#) for the full quote)

I also feared that my journey into relationship was calling me to leave the comfort of the corporate world; this fear eventually materialized. This journey was calling me to leave life as I knew it. I didn't realize at the time how all-inclusive my journey would become. In Twelve Step recovery we often tell newcomers:

*You don't have to change much
just everything.*

The Decision to Depart

From 2003 through 2005, I was living half-time in Heidelberg, Germany. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this time of solitude was helping me transition to a new life. It actually took me a few months to be okay with being alone.

Given my spiritual studies at the time, I was working on my relationship with my Self, which is the starting point for all other relationships.

Eased Into Departure

By being away from my family (Allie was our only child still living at home), I was learning to be comfortable by myself; this took some getting used to. I was distancing myself from Sue and from my religion. I was also coming to realize that I would need to leave HP.

*I was being gently called
to venture into the unknown.*

After a 40 year relationship with Sue (a 35 year marriage), 35 years of active engagement in my religion, and 20 years at HP, I was slowly making the unconscious decision to leave all of that. All of those relationships needed to change. They did not need to end; they did need to change.

Change to what, I did not know, but deep down inside I knew I had to leave (i.e., change) those relationships.

If not today, when?

If Not Today, When?

In the spring of 2005, I was presented with my first threshold-crossing event, a decision I *had* to make. I needed to decide whether or not I would leave HP, after working there for 20 years.

I can remember the precise instant that decision was finalized. I was sitting in my car, in the driveway of our home in Loveland, CO. There was a deadline looming later that day. Was I going to participate in HP's Voluntary Severance package (early retirement)? I was just sitting there, when I decided to flip on the radio and listen to NPR (National Public Radio) for a few moments. As soon as I did, I heard a voice from the radio say, "Well ... today's going to be a big day!" That was just too weird for me, so I turned the radio off and just sat there in silence. Then, I decided to try the radio again, when I heard, "If not today, when?" This really happened!

I did end up making the decision that day to leave HP, the company I had loved working for and the work I truly loved.

THE DEPARTURE

When I returned to Germany and informed the SAP executive with whom I had been working that I was leaving HP, he was visibly shaken. He asked me who he needed to talk to in order to undo my decision. Then, seeing that the decision had been mine, and that I was firm about it, he said, "That is a bold move." He was right; it was bold. I was wondering where I had found the courage to make such a move. Later, I realized that:

*Courage actually comes after
a bold decision, not before.*

A Bold Move

Making a bold move "calls" for courage, and courage comes. Then, there is greater courage that arrives for future bold moves, creating an ever-empowering virtuous cycle of increasing boldness and courage.

The etymology of the word courage is:

To live from the heart.

Not knowing what life had in store for me, I felt both courageous and fearful.

*Sometimes life drags me,
kicking and screaming,
to precisely where I truly want to be.*

"Burn Baby Burn!"

The phrase above is often repeated during an eight-day long creative celebration called [Burning Man](#), which I attended twice with my children, in 2009 with Aaron and Mike, then again in 2010 with Mike and Allie. More important than you understanding the details of this unique gathering (which is impossible) is for you to understand how it liberated me, how it freed me up to make the necessary changes that were being called into my life. [\[illustration: Mike and me at Burning Man\]](#)



For my journey into the heart of relationship, "Burn baby burn" has come to mean:

*Burn up the old
to make room for the new.*

People who attend this event are called "burners." Two major conflagrations occur during its eight days. On the seventh night, The Man is burned – a huge wooden statue, typically 80-100 feet tall (it changes every year). Burning The Man is a fiery and festive pagan-like event. On the eighth and final night, the Temple is burned – a quiet and solemn event – a structure further out on the playa or open space (see the aerial picture of the Burning Man event, below).

During Burning Man, we visited hundreds of extraordinarily creative campsites and traveled around Black Rock City (the temporary city that is Burning Man) on our bikes and in amazing art cars. We frequented Center Camp, where there is round-the-clock entertainment and presentations; it is the only place where commerce is allowed (we could buy ice and espresso, the essentials!). Out on the playa (the open space), we explored huge sculptures, The Man (in the center), and further out The Temple. [\[illustration: BRC2010\]](#)



In 2010, I wrote a note to Aaron and put it on the temple, to be burned on the final night. He could not come to Burning Man that year because his disability had progressed too far. Unbeknownst to us (Mike, Allie and me), Aaron would die a few months after Burning Man 2010, in November of that year.

Nothing could have prepared me for what I experienced at Burning Man, especially its after effect. As soon as I came through the entrance, it was like being taken to another planet. Everything was covered with dust. Everyone was dressed creatively, or not dressed at all. The atmosphere of the place was different from anything I had ever experienced before. It felt as though I had left planet Earth and had gone someplace that had many similarities to Earth, but also many differences.

The best way for me to describe the transformation that Burning Man catalyzed in my life is in a phrase from the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*:

*We have been rocketed
into a fourth dimension
of which we had not even dreamed.*

Burning Man is described as "a place united in the pursuit of a more *creative* and *connected* existence in the world," and:

*The place to find out who you are,
then take a step further.*

As I see it, both *creativity* and the understanding of personal *identity* emerge out of our *relationships*.

Some of the [10 Principles of Burning Man](#) further illustrate its impact on me and my journey: radical inclusion (all are welcomed), gifting (give freely), radical self-expression (discover and express what is within), communal effort (live deeply within the web of relationships), and immediacy (experience fully the present moment).

Burning Man changed my life. The place, event and experience opened me up to accept the changes that were being called into my life ...

"You Don't Have to Change Much, Just Everything!"

Individuals new to Twelve Step recovery often hear that phrase.

From 2005 through 2010, I ended up changing everything, even though I was not new to recovery (I had over five years clean). I left my marriage, left my religion, and left my home. I disrupted our family, and left my career; I "lost" my identity. These bold and unthinkable changes were not thrust upon me; I consciously chose them all.

Only in retrospect can I now see that:

*I changed all of my relationships;
thus catapulting me into the journey
into relationship itself.*

At the time, I described the change in my marriage, home and family as:

*Performing open heart surgery
on yourself,
while everyone watches.*

I left my religion because I had out grown it; I was being drawn to other sources for my spiritual sustenance. This change had been initiated by the spiritual openness of Twelve Step recovery. My then wife, Sue, was so dedicated to her religion ("ours" at the time) that this change meant that we needed to divorce. It may seem odd to many people that our divorce was not due to infidelity, financial calamity, drug abuse or alcoholism – the causes of many divorces. It was simply due to "religion vs spirituality," a testament as to the importance of these topics to both Sue and me.

All of these changes in these fundamentally important relationships gave me the freedom to deepen my relationship with relationship (i.e., to grow spiritually), and to venture out on this journey, recreating my life.

Venturing Into the Unknown

And so, after fundamentally changing my relationships with my wife, family, religion and career, I commenced my journey into the heart of relationship.

I ventured into the unknown ...



MIGHTY COMPANIONS

Many mighty companions helped me as I commenced my journey into relationship. I mention here only a few. They helped me in my relationship with the Universe, with myself and with the world around me.

I have already mentioned **Kirk Wilkinson**, the last manager I had at HP; he has indeed been a mighty companion.

Fear of Relapse, Fear of Success

My fear of relapse (using drugs again) and my fear of success led me back to the man I consider to be my spiritual father, the therapist who, after years of deep inner work, helped me recover from drug addiction. **Rabbi Dr. Larry Denmark** was the third and final drug therapist I worked with. (Remember, I am a slow spiritual learner.)

Prior to heading off to Germany, I met with Larry. He gave me four pieces of advice, which I still remember, after more than a decade. Here is what he suggested, so that I could improve my relationship with success:

1. **Meditate.** Successful people meditate 20 minutes, every day. With that clear suggestion, the idea of meditation changed from being a mere suggestion to being a necessity.
2. **Find a Sacred Place.** At first I thought this was my roof top studio apartment in Heidelberg, Germany. Then, I thought it was Germany, itself. Now I realize that the sacred place is *within* me; it is wherever I am. [\[illustration: a picture of Heidelberg taken from Philosopher's Way. I call the person in the lower-left corner "an artist of the soul," my goal in life\]](#)
3. **Go to the Source.** Larry knew I was taking a stack of spiritual books with me to Germany. I was trying to *figure out* how spirituality might help in strategic alliances. His advice was to get the books that were referred to *in* the books I was reading; look at the footnotes, he said. This advice led me to *A Course in Miracles*.
4. **Stay True to Yourself.** When I heard those words, I was struck with two thoughts. If I am to really stay true to myself, I will have to leave my religion. And, if I leave my religion, I will have to leave my wife. Larry's response to those thoughts was, "Don't leave either one, if you are angry." It would take me another seven years before I could leave those relationships without anger, and to instead leave both from within love.



Larry also worked with me on the "eighteen inch drop" from my head to my heart. Ultimately, I came to realize that this wasn't a drop at all, but a vibrant connection, an internal relationship that needed to be established between my head and heart.

Books as Mighty Companions

Sometimes help comes into our lives in the form of [books](#), making their authors our mighty companions:

- ***Sermon on the Mount*** by Emmet Fox - this book taught me that spirituality was nothing magical or mystical. It taught me that spirituality is simply about the deepening of relationship, with Self, others, and God; and, that it is all one relationship!
- ***A Course in Miracles*** by Helen Schucman - this book taught me how to bring forgiveness into relationship. It taught me of the importance of removing the obstacles we erect between us and our true Self, others, and God (i.e., undoing the ego). It brought clarity to my emerging spiritually-based practices, such as changing how I perceive others, hearing the voice-of-the-collective (the [2-Slide Methodology\[TM\]](#)), using

[confrontation to call for trust](#), [being a value-creator](#), and being an illuminating mirror (the power of gratitude).

- ***Change the World*** by Robert E. Quinn - this book was a parting gift from Kirk Wilkinson, my manager at HP. He delivered it to me in Heidelberg, Germany, as we were transitioning the HP/SAP alliance from me to him. This book validated the explicit linkage between business and spirituality. It illuminated my career path as a strategic alliance manager. Nearly two decades of personal experience made cohesive sense; it brought tears to my eyes. It helped illustrate how to become a [transformational alliance manager](#). (For a summary of Quinn's book, see [Appendix A](#); it is powerful!).

These mighty books gave me insight and confidence. Clearly, I was on the right track.

I should continue on my journey into relationship.

TRIALS AND FEARS

Since making the decision to embark upon this journey, I have had many thoughts and experiences that *seem* to want to impede my progression. My sharing of this journey with you would be incomplete if I didn't share the obstacles and challenges.

In retrospect, I see now that on the other side of each of these *seeming* obstacles are gifts and blessings.

You Blew It!

A continually recurring thought has been that leaving HP, leaving the comfort of the corporate world, was a huge mistake.

What was I thinking when I made that decision? How can I get back into the corporate world? Is it too late to go back? Am I too old? This type of reflection has caused deep self-doubt.

I left HP in 2005. Then in 2008 came the Great Recession. This seemed like clear evidence that the Universe was in fact conspiring *against* me. The Recession pushed the role of strategic alliance management into organizational obscurity (businesses tended to de-staff the position), and alliance managers were pressured to be less about *value-creation* and more about *value-exchange*. Both trends seemed to oppose the fulfilment of my purpose and passion in life.

Stop Trying to "Obsolete Yourself"

Starting in 2003 and continuing to the present, I have consciously practiced what I call "self-Obsolescence" (obsoleting my lesser self, in order to allow my greater Self to emerge).

As I give away my most precious nuggets of wisdom (my best ideas), as I try to obsolete my lesser (isolated) self, I know I will receive back from the Universe, and I will be drawn closer to my true Self (the divinity within).

As I give, I receive. This "law of nature" is inevitable (it is, after all, the law!), and it is instantaneous. It does not necessarily apply to tangible gifts (things), but it does apply to intangible offerings (valuable ideas, and love).

This practice naturally changes the atmosphere in a relationship from competitive to collaborative. My experimental trial of this counter-intuitive practice started in the HP/SAP alliance, and it worked. It helped us accomplish the impossible!

Since leaving HP, I have continued to give away my best ideas, by publishing a book, numerous whitepapers and a website. It is unclear as of yet, at this point in my life, that this practice is really working.

There is part of myself that is now telling me, "The world has become too greedy, too near-term profit oriented, and too fearful for this kind of stuff to work anymore. You really blew it when you left HP in 2005, and you're continuing to blow it with this naive and simple-minded practice. When will you ever grow up?"

Get More Spiritual

When I was separating from Sue, prior to our divorce, I needed a place to stay. My NA sponsor at the time encouraged me to move to the spiritual community in which he was living. In addition to providing me with a home, getting more spiritual seemed to be a good idea. It even gave me an opportunity to practice strategic alliancing between one of our sister communities in California and an adjacent health spa.

Over a three year period, I experienced healthy and unhealthy examples of relationship and community. Before moving into this community, I was hired by its leader to conduct a workshop on confrontation. After living there for a few years, I was asked to leave, because I was *confronting* leadership about their shadows.

I must say, the whole experience was spiritually enlightening. I ended up growing a lot, often in unexpected ways because of unpredictable events. I grew in my experientially-based understanding of relationship, community and spirituality.

Don't Trust Anyone!

While living in the spiritual community, events occurred that caused me to not trust its spiritual leader.

I mentioned my lack of trust to a past leader of that community. After all, if you cannot trust a spiritual leader, who can you trust? What he said shocked me.

He said, "Do not trust him. Do not completely trust *anyone*!" He then went on to say, "You cannot completely trust any one *person*. Instead you *can* trust the *relationship* that is *between* you and the other person. You can absolutely trust the spirit that lives *in* that relationship, which is different than, but '*related to*,' trusting the other person."

Trust relationship itself.

Mind vs Heart

Throughout my life I have used my mind to compete and to prove myself, to prove my value.

In the Navy, I was #1 in every class, included advanced electronics. In college, I graduated magna cum laude in electrical engineering.

I use to think that I could think my way to spiritual enlightenment. Consequently, I have often been told that I am "too cerebral" (i.e., I think too much), and that I need to be more open-hearted. As mentioned earlier, my personality (Type 3 in the Enneagram) is both open-hearted *and* closed-hearted (mind-oriented). I can present a stoic façade while simultaneously being very sensitive. I feel deeply, while trying to suppress or hide from those feelings.

As I am returning from this journey, I still think that I (by *myself*) can *figure out* (by thinking) what my service to the world should be. Again, I am a slow spiritual learner and I am thick-headed.

At times, I can still *think* that there is an internal battle between my mind and heart. It can be hard for me to think of there being a *relationship* between my mind and heart, or to think that such a relationship would be a good thing.

Women and the Feminine

Relating to women and to the feminine aspect of myself has been one of the most challenging areas of my life.

I have been good at providing for my family, being a good father and a good husband, doing well in school, winning in competitive swimming, and accomplishing the impossible in strategic alliances. What I have not been so good at is relating to women and following my heart. Tapping into my intuition and expressing my feelings is, at times, hard for me.

As I write about women and the feminine, I am reminded that I have been called on a journey into the *heart of relationship*, a calling for which I was ill prepared. Throughout my life, I have been accused of being excessively competitive and too cerebral – traits which are counter to having healthy relationships. And, opening my heart and initiating intimate relationships with women has been challenging for me. One reason for this may be the lack of feminine presence in my family of origin. I had no sisters, and my mother was domineering, and therefore, emotionally distant. Sue, the woman who became my wife of thirty-five years, initiated our first date in high school.

After our divorce in 2010, I **was** able to begin dating. However, just as with my inability to see relationship clearly, I was unable to see whether we were actually "dating," or not. One time, I asked Andrea if we were dating. She said, "No. Not yet." I then said, "Okay. Let me know when that starts." And, I still remain unable to clearly see if a woman is interested in me. When I am with a group of friends, another man might ask me afterwards, "Did you see her make a *pass* at you? Can you see that she is interested in you?" to which I will say, "No. I did not see that. What did that look like?"

*Life calls us on the journeys
we most need for our growth.*

On this journey into the *heart of relationship*, women and my feminine nature play critically important roles. Women tend to be more relationship-oriented than men. When I am in touch with my feminine nature, I do a better job of connecting.

One of the "coincidences" in my life is that I am a Type 3 in the [Enneagram of Personality](#) – labeled the Achiever (I like that label!). Interestingly, the Achiever is in the center of the heart area of the Enneagram. Paradoxically, this means that I can, at times, be both very connected to *and* very distant from my heart. I am both highly sensitive *and* I try to hide my emotions (be stoic). In *A Course in Miracles*, this paradoxical tension in relationships is described as, "Come here, go away." I intrinsically desire closer relationships in my life, while at the same time, I fear intimacy. Perhaps this journey is calling me to *bridge* that paradox. Perhaps that is my purpose in life; perhaps that is what I am to "achieve." Perhaps.

In *A Course of Love*, it says that humanity is entering into "the time of Mary." We are entering into a time of greater heart, feelings and intimacy, a time when we are all called to deepen our relationships. This will be a time of great tenderness, as we enter the embrace and return home. It is about time! I feel as if we have had enough of the "age of reasoning" (mind by itself) and excessive competition (masculine by itself) influence. This brings to mind another coincidence in my life. I was born 3 days before Christmas. My parents had hoped that I would be a girl. They were planning to call me Mary, and so, I was named Joseph instead.

This may sound grandiose, but I was born on the Winter Solstice, the darkest day of the year, the day the light began to return. We are all called to bring light into the world.



Either/Or vs Both/And.

If there is one thing I have learned from various spiritual studies and from life experience, it is that "both/and" often provides better results than "either/or." What the world needs is more masculine *and* feminine, more mind *and* heart, more thoughts *and* feelings, more competition *and* collaboration, and even more darkness *and* light. This is how we end duality in the world – an often-stated quest in many spiritual teachings.

Mind *and* Heart

Over the past decade or so, I have come to realize that there is no need for any sort of competition between mind and heart. In any relationship, an either/or attitude is never as helpful as a both/and mindset.

Whenever I am stuck in a seemingly either/or situation, if I can explore a both/and perspective, things improve; such is the paradox of life.

In the Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book, it says that God gave us a mind to use, but it needs to be used on a spiritual basis, in a collaborative *relationship* with the heart. This realization is both a solution and a challenge.

How can I have a more collaborative relationship between mind and heart? How can I deepen that relationship? The answer is in dialogue, inner dialogue between mind and heart. I can ask myself, "How do I *feel* about that *thought*?" and then, "What do I *think* about that *feeling*?" This iterative process deepens my relationship with the truth that lives within me, in the relationship between mind and heart.

What do I think about that feeling?
How do I feel about that thought?

All of the seeming obstacles in life actually offer deep lessons, if I am open to hear them – if I am open to dialogue.

DEATH AND REBIRTH

In late 2010 (in the midst of my journey), our oldest child, Aaron, died at the age of 33 from Friedreich's Ataxia. My relationship with his disability and my relationship with his death taught me much about life.

Aaron's disability and his eventual death was part of the reason I used drugs; I was trying to hide from my feelings. I didn't want to face the inevitable. There was nothing I could do about it. Why talk about it? Why not avoid it?

I learned much from my relationship with Friedreich's Ataxia. In this instance, it was the power of dialogue. The power of listening, just listening. The power of being heard, of being listened to. Dialogue is not about fixing anything or giving advice. It is about listening and being heard.

Listening is loving.

With love comes transformation.

Embrace Death

We reached the point where we embraced Aaron's death. We planned out his memorial service with him. Attendees would be required to wear tie dye, his favorite/only clothing. Attendees would be given some of his ashes and asked to plant them with a tree. [\[illustration: Aaron in the Grand Canyon\]](#)

As his death approached, people from all over the country came to visit Aaron to give their love and say goodbye. A men's group that I was part of at the time decided to have a pizza party at Aaron's home, in effect, saying, "Wow, you're getting ready to die? Awesome! Let's have a party!"



During one of my private conversations with Aaron, I asked him to do a favor for me. I said, "When you get to the other side, would you pull some strings for me?" Over the past year or so, I've heard him say to me, "Dad, that's all we're doing up here. Pulling strings for you guys."

The night before Aaron died, he said, "Let the cheerleaders know I'm coming." The following morning, I had the joy of lying in bed with Aaron and embracing him while he died.

I lay there and said, "It's okay for you to go. Go ahead and go. It's okay."

If you really want to live, embrace death.

TRANSFORMATION

Death can be seen as letting go of the old. It can be about choosing, or being compelled to see things differently. Death can be about seeing life differently. [\[illustration\]](#)

A death can simultaneously be a birth or rebirth, if we are willing to allow it, if we are willing to see death differently. If we are willing to *forgive* death ...

Death and birth are obvious transformations. We can also bring transformation into our lives and into all of our relationships through the process of forgiveness.

I have briefly touched upon the topic of forgiveness elsewhere in this article. Now I need to explain what I mean by my use of that word.

Forgiveness is choosing to see differently.

It is choosing to look past the superficial, in order to see the authentic. It is choosing to look past the outer, in order to see the inner. It is choosing to look past a situation, in order to see the love on the other side.

Choosing to See Differently

This definition takes us to the root of forgiveness – *seeing* differently.

Choosing to *look past* the outer (e.g., what someone has done to us) to the inner (i.e., the truth of who they are). It is choosing to look past a situation, in order to see what is *really* going on. And, it's not just a "different seeing" for the sake of seeing differently. There is an objective in this conscious change of perspective.

*How can I see in a way that
brings with it greater peace?*

A Call for Peace

Because there is a relationship between me and the other person, a relationship between me and the situation, any increase in peace that comes into me, then comes into the relationship and affects the other person and the situation, too.

There is a relationship between peace and truth.

*With peace,
comes truth.*

When I am at peace, I can see more truly. When there are various choices to be made, the one associated with the greater peace tends to be the best choice.

Forgiveness (seeing truly, from a place of peace) clears the air in a relationship and allows spirit to emerge.

Death and Birth
On my journey into relationship

Personal Transformation	
Death of the Old	Birth of the New
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigid religious beliefs (focused on the past, future, and elsewhere) • Competitive relationships – trying to prove that I am better than you. • Being excessively cerebral – thinking I can figure things out (inner competition). • Avoid feelings. • I need to make things happen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open spirituality (focused on deepening relationship, here and now) • Collaborative relationships – showing us both that we are both great. • Being wholehearted – my mind needs to allow my heart to lead, and be in dialogue (inner collaboration). • The heart is the portal to spirit. • We can allow creation to occur.

GP'S

A Call for Truth

Peace and truth arrive together. When I am at peace, I see more clearly; I can see more truthfully. When a "bolt of truth" strikes me (i.e., an insightful idea), it often has a peaceful feeling associated with it.

I want peace and truth in my relationships and throughout my life. Therefore, forgiveness, peace and truth are more than worthwhile topics to explore on my journey into relationship.

Why Are We Called on Journeys?

I believe that life compels us to take journeys. A benevolent Universe conspires on our behalf. Why?

- To help us see things differently. To see the world around us differently. To see others differently. And, ultimately to see ourselves differently.
- To help us learn, grow and be transformed into who we were meant to be. To become our true Selves.
- To help us learn how and why to practice forgiveness.
- To show us how to "clear the air" in our relationships, in all of our relationships: with others, with the world around us (with nature), with our Selves, with God (a.k.a., Higher Power or the Universe).

*Life calls us on the journeys
we most need for our growth.*

The Universe calls us on journeys in order to help us remove obstacles between us and [love](#). The Universe calls us on journeys in order to help us return home.

Ongoing Forgiveness Opportunities

As with everyone in this world, I have endless opportunities to practice forgiveness. Given that forgiveness brings with it peace and truth, these forgiveness opportunities bear gifts.

These gifts cannot be unwrapped all by ourselves; they can only be unwrapped in relationship. They may be enveloped in unpleasant wrapping paper, but inside is wisdom, light and love.

On the other side of forgiveness is a healthier, more open and more loving relationship (whether or not the specific form of that relationship continues or not).



Forgiving Relationship Itself

It may seem esoteric or academic to think about forgiving relationship, but this is what my journey into relationship has been about. Slowly, over time, I began to see relationship itself differently.

Prior to the journey, I didn't really see relationship at all. As is the case with many people and most businesses, relationship was invisible. It was unseen and unacknowledged as anything real or tangible.

When I first started working in strategic alliances (relationships between companies), relationship was seen as a source of problems that needed to be managed and neutralized.

Now I see relationship as a source of all creativity. Nothing in the world happens outside of relationship. It is all we have.

When we are functioning as a strategic alliance manager, relationship defines our role and our value to our companies. It is what we are.

Transcendence and Transformation

From my experience in Twelve Step recovery, I half-jokingly say that I can replace the Twelve Steps with just two steps:

1. **With acceptance comes transcendence.** The first nine Steps of recovery are about acceptance: fully accepting that I am an addict, I stop fighting my addiction. When I do that, the disease of addiction loses its hold on me; it loses its power. I rise above it, and I *transcend* the disease of addiction. This principle seems true throughout my life: whenever I can fully *accept* something, rather than fight it, that thing loses its power over me. Acceptance does not mean that I am in agreement with the person or situation, and it doesn't mean that I take no action. It simply means that I stop fighting.
2. **With embracement comes transformation.** The last three Steps of recovery are about embracement: incorporating recovery into my life, deepening my relationship with my Higher Power and being of service. Embracement is acceptance coupled with love. Accepting a gift from another person is a simple act. You accept it and say, "Thank you." When you *embrace* that gift, you hold it close to your heart; you accept it with love. When I embraced the idea that I am an addict, through acts of loving service, I embraced my addiction, and it then became *transformed*. It has been changed from a curse into a blessing. It brings gifts and lessons into my life and into the world around me.

Forgiveness (choosing to see differently) enables both acceptance and embracement.

Forgiveness enables transformation.

There is a huge role for forgiveness (and hence transformation) in strategic alliances and in all of our intense and important (i.e., long-term value-creating) relationships.

MID-JOURNEY INSIGHTS

Insight: inner sight, vision, wisdom.

Starting in 2000, I began a quest. I sought to understand how spiritual principles could help me in my work as a strategic alliance manager. How could spirituality help make these relationships more creative? This explicit intention was inspired by the Twelfth Step in NA:

*Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps,
we tried to carry this message to addicts, and
to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

I endeavored to practice spiritual principles in all of my affairs, especially in my work in business relationships. I can now see that that intention (i.e., that prayer) of nearly 20 years ago has been answered. Many initial insights came via my experience in the HP/SAP alliance, mentioned earlier. Since then, my life experiences provided me with deeper understandings of those insights, and new insights into relationship (i.e., new spiritual wisdom).

Below is a brief summary of some of these mid-journey insights which provided the foundation for future principles and practices. These are expounded upon in the *Gifts from the Journey* and *Dialogue: The Heart of Relationship* sections, toward the end of this document.

Little did I know it at the time, but *relationship* is both the question and the answer. Relationships can be the source of our greatest challenges, and they can be the source of our greatest growth, creativity and transformation.

How I Began to See Relationship Differently

Relationships are not the source of problems, to be avoided or managed; they are actually the source of *all* answers and creativity.

*Nothing in the world
happens outside of a relationship.*

Think about it! Relationship is actually your *most* strategic asset, in both your personal life and in your business life.

The following ideas are about seeing relationship differently. It is, therefore, in a very real sense, about *forgiving* relationship itself – choosing to see it differently.

Realize that Trust is the Foundation

Trust is the foundation of *every* relationship. It starts within; as within, so without. When we see a lack of trust in our world, we should first ask ourselves, "How am I doing with trust? Do I have trust in myself? Am I worthy of trust?"

There is a phrase that I first heard in the rooms of recovery (AA and NA), "If you spot it, you got it," which can also be described as *projection*. We tend to project outward, onto the world around us, the internal issues we are most uncomfortable with. If I feel as though I am untrustworthy, I might unconsciously attempt to distance myself from that issue by seeing it in others. To be clear, this does not mean that it doesn't exist in the world around me; I did, in fact, see it. What it does suggest is that I must first deal with that issue within myself, before I attempt to deal with it in my outer world.

So, after I have looked at and dealt with my inner trust issues, how can I have greater trust in my relationships with others? Read on ...

First, Deal with Obstacles and Impediments

While working at HP, I developed and used a [transformational methodology](#) that focused an alliance team on (a) the removal of value-impediments, and (b) the creation of incremental value. Inevitably, whenever I asked whether we should focus first on incremental value (what is expected to be created in the alliance) or value-impediments (the challenges in that relationship), the universal answer was, "Let's focus first on the value, what we want from the alliance. Let's focus on the positive stuff first, because that will provide the motivation that will allow us to deal with the issues." This ordering might make sense energetically, but it doesn't make sense from a relationship perspective.

From a relationship perspective, the obstacles and impediments have detrimental impact *in* the relationship. They obscure our ability to *hear* and *see*. They obscure our ability to hear the voice-of-the-collective (what the alliance is trying to tell us), and they obscure our ability to see the practical long-term vision that lives in that relationship. We cannot hear the solutions to our most vexing problems. We also cannot see new opportunities.

Because of unaddressed issues in a relationship, the overall atmosphere in that relationship is counter-productive to collaboration, the ability to create. When these issues are continually ignored and suppressed, they end up festering, making the climate toxic.

One of the most effective ways to increase trust and clear the air in a relationship is to "call for trust," and then, trust that trust will come. How can we "call for trust?" Paradoxically, we call for trust via the loving practice of confrontation. By use of the word "confrontation," I mean to co-front or co-face difficult issues *in* the relationship, via open and loving dialogue, with the other person or organization. Together, we look directly at, deal with, and then overcome the impediments in that relationship. (Specific practices for doing this are covered more thoroughly in the *Dialogue: The Heart of Relationship* section, toward the end of this document.)

This process is analogous to what can occur in our interpersonal relationships. We've all had experiences where we have an especially challenging relationship, filled with difficult issues, often resulting in a loss of trust. *After* those issues are dealt with, someone whom we had previously thought of as an enemy can become a close friend. We have to deal with the difficult issues first, and the level of trust increases. We couldn't have started off by saying, "Hey, let's just be friends." That approach never works, because the ordering of events is backwards; first, deal with the issues, then trust will increase and the relationship will improve.

In the world of business, I often hear strategic alliance managers lament by saying, "We do have challenging issues in the alliance, but we cannot address them yet, because the level of trust is low." To which I say, "Address those issues, head on and in a healthy manner, and *then* you will see the level of trust increase." How else will trust increase? Can you say, "Hey, let's just have more trust"? Again, that approach never works, because the ordering of events is backwards.

After we have transcended the obstacles and impediments in a relationship, trust increases. The atmosphere improves, and the ability to collaboratively create value increases. We can see and hear more clearly. We then uncover the spirit that lives in relationship: inspiration, creativity, enthusiasm, and love.

Then, Let Relationship Lead the Way to Greater Creativity

After the air is cleared, we can see and hear more clearly. We can hear the voice-of-the-collective. This is an act of listening to the relationship. Listening is an act of love, and love is always (at some level) reciprocated. And so, the relationship will love us back. It will share its spirit with us.

Through the process of listening to relationship itself, the relationship will provide us with answers to our most vexing challenges, it will tell us of new creative opportunities, and it will show us a practical and compelling long-term vision.

The relationship itself will lead us to a more creative future.

Encourage Creation to Continue Emerging

Relationships are living things. We need to continue to "feed" them by listening to them, which is an act of love. We need to be vigilant in our awareness of the climate in the relationship; we need to make sure it remains healthy by proactively dealing with difficult issues, as they arise.

We can actually grow to realize that challenges, issues, obstacles and impediments, all come bearing gifts. We get excited when we recognize them, knowing there is greater creativity and love on the other side.

As we continue to nourish our relationship, it will continue to provide us with new ideas, inspiration, enthusiasm and love. In a very real sense that relationship will become a home to us; in business relationships, these can become our "home away from home."

Greatness begets greatness.

Loving homes are attractive. Warm, open and loving relationships attract others who want to come and join in. They want to be part of whatever it is that is happening there. They want to come home.

Be a Creator

What does it mean to be a creator? It means to be worthy of trust. It means to focus on the removal of issues that stand in the way of creation. It means to create things of value. It means to love. It means to be concerned about the climate. It means to foster Heaven on earth – home.

We will do well by thinking of ourselves as the god of our relationships. Not *the* God, but a god. A creator, focused on enabling greater creation to happen.

As a creator overseeing a relationship, we are about building bridges – between ourselves and others, between individuals and between organizations. Good negotiators see themselves as bridging between ideas.

We are bridge builders.

Beyond being builders of bridges, we are the bridge itself that spans the seeming space between people, between ideas, and between companies.

We are the bridge.

The first bridge we need to build is within ourselves, between our mind and heart, and with our Self. The following ideas help us build bridges by being the bridge itself.

Five Simple Truths

As I spent time in Heidelberg, Germany, reading, writing, meditating and reflecting, I came upon five simple truths which, when embodied (held in consciousness), have, as a practical result, the deepening of relationship:

1. **Oneness.** Think of yourself as being at one with everything and everyone. There is no "other." This idea seems to form the basis for such philosophical ideals as Karma and the Golden Rule; what I am doing or thinking about another, I am actually doing to myself. Either we are all one, or we are not; there is no in between. Imagine that we are.
2. **Now.** All we really ever have is this present moment. Multi-tasking is a lie; our minds can only time-slice (dedicate bits of time to a specific task); they cannot multi-task (do two or more tasks at the same time). No matter what we're doing, we're always better off to be very present. All we have is now.

3. **We Create.** We were created by our creator to create. We are creative beings. Creation starts in our minds, with new ideas. These new ideas are always conceived of in a relationship of some form: with our Creator, between our mind and heart, with others. We were born to create.
4. **Love.** [Love](#) is the universal force that counters entropy (things falling apart); it compels us all to grow; it is synonymous with growth. Love is the force that compels individuals, organizations, communities, companies, countries and all of humanity to grow. Many religions think of God as Love, and so, we who are created from love, must also be love. Love is also the glue that binds us together. As I see it, love and relationship are synonymous. As *A Course in Miracles* says, "Love is all there is;" all we have is relationship.
5. **Trust.** Trust is the foundation of all relationships. And, since all we have is relationship, trust is the foundation of all we have; it is the foundation of life itself.

Click [here](#) for an expanded discussion of these principles. These ideas seem to span religions and spiritual philosophies. Ultimately, as we delve deeper and deeper into any these simple truths, they all will lead us to the same point: God, oneness, love, truth, et.al.

The truthfulness of these ideas lies in personal experience. Try them out. Embody them. As you do, you will notice how your relationships all deepen: with your Self, with others, and with the Universe (everything else).

Identity

How we interact with others and the world around us is tied directly to our sense of personal identity.

Who do you think you are? The answer to this question affects who you think others are, and how you will relate to them.

Identity defines attitude and mindset (i.e., our worldview), which affect the depth of our relationships.

Can you fully accept the idea that you are a powerful creator?

FEARING THE RETURN

I have been out of the corporate world for over twelve years. During this time, I have been fundamentally transformed. I have gained practical spiritual-based (i.e., relationship-oriented) insights, that I know will be helpful in the world of business, or in another setting. And yet, I fear return.

I am reluctant and skeptical about returning.

Can I really go back? Do I want to go back? What will it cost me, spiritually and emotionally, to return? Will the insights from my journey be valued by others? What if I am a failure?

What if I am really successful? Can I handle success? Do I know what success for me would look like?

Maybe my "return" needs to be to someplace other than a corporation.

Such are my fears of returning to some version of my former life.

Can I Really Return?

If I return to being a strategic alliance manager in the world of business, will I get sucked back into the way I use to be? There are many ways I could describe the "old Joe": fear-based, scarcity-oriented, too competitive, excessively driven, with shallow relationships, etc. Will I then become repelled by myself?

I have gone through so much over the past 10 to 20 years that I wonder whether I can really return. Can I return to life as I knew it? Can I return to the corporate world? Do I want to return?

I have learned on my journey that my mind and self-will have the potential to impede my spiritual progress; they can impede my return; they can impede my ability to be of service. Are my mind and self-will actually impeding me today?

I can *think* that I know what my journey should be and what my return should look like. I think I can *self-will* my plans onto the Universe. Both of these things will impede my progress. Both intellect and self-will can end up impeding my return, which may not be a return at all. Maybe what life has in store for me is a "return" to a life beyond my wildest dreams.

Fear of Losing Serenity

It seems to me that returning from this journey is similar to returning from a vacation. I have obtained a sense of serenity and a peace of mind that I never had before. And, I don't want to lose either.

I am currently semi-retired. This brings with it a certain work/life balance I have never had before. I have the luxury of only doing what I love. I can be selective in the projects I work on, and the clients I work for.

I fear being sucked back into a fear-based, scarcity-oriented, obsessed-on-doing-more-than-being, and excessively-competitive world of business.

Perhaps I can create a new world of business.

Fear Failure – Of Not Being Valued

This has been a pervading fear of mine for the past 12-15 years. I ask myself such questions as:

- Why don't others see the obvious need to focus on the deepening of relationship (i.e., applying practical spiritual principles in strategic alliances)?
- Am I deluding myself in terms of the unique value I am offering?
- Are corporations increasingly moving away from value-creation (strategic alliances) and toward value-exchange (channel relationships) and even value-extraction relationships?
- Can corporations move back to being more value-creative, and thus appreciating what I have to offer?

Fear of Success

When I am in this fear I ask myself:

- What would success look like, at this point in the journey?
- Can I accept what I used to think of as success?
- Do I even know what a very successful (completely new) life would look like?
- What if everything in my life worked out perfectly? Then who would I blame?

Maybe I have already returned ...

Maybe I never actually left ...

Maybe I am already very successful, and just cannot see it.

Is the World Ready for Me?

Maybe the world is not ready for what I have to offer. Maybe it will never be ready.

Maybe it is simply a matter of time ...

THE RETURN

I do feel as though I am returning to a new life.

How new of a life? Where will that life take me? I don't know.

Will I return to the corporate world or some other world? I don't know.

Nonetheless, I feel I am being called back, to something, to some place.

MORE MIGHTY COMPANIONS

Earlier I mentioned mighty companions who helped me depart on my journey. Now I mention companions who encouraged my on-going journey and eventual return.

- **The NA Old-timers.** It is within this group's weekly, Sunday evening gatherings, where I first experienced what I would later call "dialogue." Started in April of 2008, a group of men from Narcotics Anonymous, with multiple-years of clean time, got together for 1.5 hours and just talked and listened. Each week, someone would "tee-up" a spiritual topic, then we would discuss that topic, we would watch it take on a life of its own. These spiritual ideas would morph, grow and fly about the room. We experienced the unknown becoming known; our understanding grew and deepened. Thank you, gentle men!
- **Intel.** In 2008, Intel hired me to [train 18 of their strategic alliance managers in Munich, Germany](#). Even though I tried to direct them to other consultancies (because I was in the middle of writing my book, [Spiritual Principles in Strategic Alliances](#)), they wanted me. Later that year I consulted in their [global alliance with Capgemini](#). Over the years, I have received endorsements and ongoing encouragement from my friends at Intel.

*"Your training fundamentally changed
how we think about and talk about our jobs.
I regret not having this training before starting my job."*

- **[Association of Strategic Alliance Professionals](#).** This organization selected my book as an [ASAP Best Practice](#), and it was made available to ASAP's worldwide membership (currently with 2,500 members and a LinkedIn group of over 11,000). This endorsement provided me with the understanding that my work is of real value to this profession.

*"Spiritual Principles in Strategic Alliances provides
a unique and original perspective for why
spirituality is needed in business and
especially in strategic alliances."*

- **Jeff Weiss.** A [founding partner](#) of [Vantage Partners, LLC](#) (which traces its roots to the [Program on Negotiation](#) and the book, [Getting to Yes](#)), Jeff is a friend and colleague. He has provided me with ongoing encouragement and a significant endorsement of my book. Jeff read through several drafts of my book [Spiritual Principles in Strategic Alliances](#); over the years, we have had rich dialogue on its ideas. Jeff helped me understand the contribution my work makes to the artful science of alliance management.

*"Spiritual Principles in Strategic Alliances adds a
unique and valuable perspective on spirituality and alliances.
A seasoned alliance professional, Joe shares his experiences and advice,
providing a thought provoking read for any practitioner of
the fine art of alliance management."*

- **Andrea Isaacs.** A world leader in the Enneagram, she helped me understand and then deepen my relationship with the feminine aspect of myself. She helped me open my heart toward the mother of my children (my ex-wife, Sue), with my children, into myself, and ultimately with my Self. My life has been enriched because of Andrea.

- **Joerg Gerlach.** Since 2006, I have worked for [GP+S GmbH](#), headquartered in Bad Homburg v.d.H, Germany, as a senior consultant in the field of strategic alliances and General Manager of GP+S, Inc. (their US subsidiary). A couple of years ago, Joerg encouraged me to develop two days of training modules, collaborating with me in the endeavor. His encouragement and practicality have been invaluable, financially and emotionally.

*"Joe knows, from many years of personal experience,
what really helps strategic alliance managers
and their teams succeed even in difficult times.
Joe is a real breakthrough thinker for strategic alliancing."*

- **Meg Warden.** As a long-time student of [A Course in Miracles](#) (ACIM), Meg introduced me to *A Course of Love* (ACOL) in early 2014. We studied ACOL individually and collectively, using it to facilitate our own relationship-deepening work. We later teamed up to facilitate discussion groups for both courses in Germany and the US. My relationship with Meg helped me connect more deeply with my heart, and to establish deeper heart-based relationships.
- **Santa Fe, New Mexico.** I've been living in what is often called "the city different" since January of 2016, loving what has been described as a "spiritual smorgasbord" and participating in ACIM and ACOL groups. These groups are filled with truly mighty companions, and for this I am most grateful. Our ACOL group hosted Mari Perron (mentioned below) to Santa Fe, in August of 2016.
- **Lee Flynn.** As a long-time student of both ACOL and ACIM and a deep-thinker with an open heart, I cherish my relationship with Lee. My life is blessed. He is a profoundly encouraging friend and my spiritual brother.
- **Mari Perron.** Mari describes herself as the First Receiver of the messages in [A Course of Love](#) (ACOL). *A Course in Miracles* (described by many as a precursor to ACOL) is about undoing ego identity and bringing forgiveness into *relationship*. ACOL is about discovering our true identity; we are beings in *relationship*. We are relationship itself. And, dialogue is how we can be our true Self and create "the new." I owe tremendous gratitude to both Mari and *A Course of Love*. Both have deeply influenced many of the ideas discovered during my journey, and now shared with you.
- **Shanna MacLean.** Shanna has been a cheerleader, a sister in ACIM and ACOL, and my editor. Her spiritual insights, support and encouragement have been invaluable. This document and my life are better because of Shanna.
- **Richard Kittel.** My list of Mighty Companions would be incomplete without mentioning my literal as well as spiritual brother. My older brother, Richard, helped me in my early days of recovery from alcohol and drugs, in ways not adequately describable in words. Over our lifetime we have grown closer and closer, even though he currently lives in Panama and I am in Santa Fe. His encouragement helped me in both my departure and in my on-going return from my lifelong journey into relationship.
- **Mary Love.** Mary has read through a couple versions of this document and provided me with invaluable suggestions and encouragement. Our dialogues over the past few months have open my heart, allowing me to further deepen my relationships. Her exuberance is contagious!

In truth, this list of mighty companions is incomplete. The more I think of those who have touched my life during this journey, the more people and books come to mind. For the sake of brevity I need to stop somewhere. The list above is sufficient in expressing the wonder of my gratitude.

GIFTS FROM THE JOURNEY

As I feel a return from my 12 year long journey, I have two simple messages, two thoughts to share, from which everything else I have to share is derived.

- **We are bridge builders.** Our job in this life is to facilitate the creation of deep, healthy and creative relationships.
- **We are the bridge.** Our work begins within ourselves. We are relationship itself.

Read on ...

We Are Bridge Builders

Strategic Alliance Managers Build Bridges

As stated at the beginning, this article is primarily oriented toward strategic alliance managers – individuals involved in the establishment, development and management of long-term value-creating relationships between companies. [\[illustration\]](#)

The lessons learned on this journey, however, can be applied outside of business to any intimate (i.e., close) and important relationship. Aren't we all interested in long-term value-creating relationships?

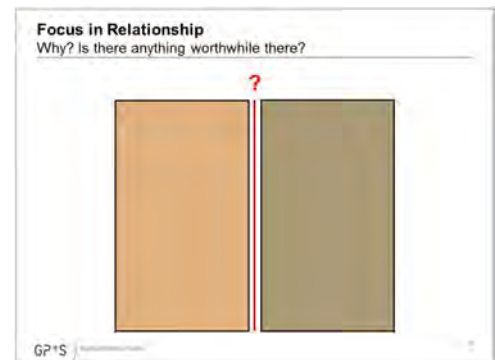
*We all seek for healthier
and deeper relationships.*

Over 20 years ago, I was working in HP's Industry Landscape Team, where we worked in HP's business ecosystem (around UNIX), multi-company alliances (driving industry standards), and industry consortia (e.g., X/Open and POSIX).

I recall a conversation with my manager at the time, Buzz Walker (another Mighty Companion). I told him I was interested in focusing on relationship itself, i.e., to dive into the line between companies (see the illustration above). He discouraged me. He was concerned that I would get "pigeon holed" there, that my career would be limited, and there wasn't real strategic value there – it was too vague and ambiguous. Nonetheless, I felt drawn into relationship itself. We have both changed and grown since then. And it is interesting that both of our lives have expanded into relationship, although he might describe it as "oneness."

All We Have is Relationship

It astounds me to realize that most alliances fail, mostly because businesses "suck" (i.e., fail) at relationship. It is astounding because our work is *only* about relationship: between companies, between organizations (internally and externally), between individuals, between us (as individuals) and our ideas. Relationship even exists between ideas themselves: between the IP (intellectual property) assets of both companies, between the ideas of confrontation and trust, and between masculine and feminine ideas (like competition and collaboration, or thoughts and feelings). [\[illustration\]](#)



The challenges obscure opportunity. If a relationship is intended to create value, to be creative, these obstacles are value-impediments. These impediments can be thought of as clouds in the relationship. They need to be seen and overcome.

Our first task is the removal of value-impediments. This is done by seeing these obstacles clearly and thoroughly, then choosing a way to look past them or see them differently (i.e., forgiveness).

This work cannot be done alone; both sides need to actively participate in sharing perspective. By focusing collective attention on these issues, they are seen more clearly, and therefore, they begin to lose their power.

*It is simple:
remove impediments,
create value.*

With the "air cleared" (value-impediments removed), value creating opportunities are then seen. Again, this work cannot be done alone. Both sides need to actively share perspective on what they see as the creative possibility that lives in the relationship.

*This is simple work.
This is hard work.*

Nothing Happens Outside of Relationship

Nothing in the world happens outside of relationship. Creativity and creation require a relationship. This relationship exists between product developers and customers, within collaborative teams, and between us and our Creator (a.k.a., the Universe).

Nothing happens outside of relationship.

The creation and exchange of value require a relationship.

Business ecosystems are webs of relationships: amongst competitors and collaborators, throughout supply chains, amongst industry consortia (setting standards), encompassing customers and suppliers, with industry analysts and consultancies, and with oversight by regulatory agencies (government).

Without Relationship, We Die

A company cannot exist in isolation. Without relationships, it dies. The same is true for us as individuals.

The two industries where strategic alliances are most prevalent are high-technology (computers, software, professional services, distributors, integrators, etc.) and bio-technology (medical devices, surgical instruments, medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, etc.). In both industries, creating alliances is a *life or death* matter. In high-technology, it is life or death for companies. In bio-technology, it is life or death for people (i.e., patients).

We are all dependent on a healthy, life-giving relationship with our planet and the universe. Our supply of food is dependent on a vast web of relationships. When newborn babies are deprived of physical touch (relationship), their entire life is negatively impacted; sustained lack of affection can actually kill them. When prisoners are in solitary confinement for long periods of time, they can go insane and commit suicide.

*We all need relationship.
We all need each other.*

Where is the Bridge?

Answering these questions is the purpose of this document:

- Where precisely is this bridge we are trying to build?
- What is its foundation?
- How is it built?

We Are the Bridge

This may be a difficult idea to grasp and understand; it has been for me.

We are relationship itself.

As Within, so Without

I have arrived at this realization – that we are relationship itself – by melding together two ideas (i.e., by "bridging" between ideas).



1. **As within, so without.** Growth and transformation starts first, within oneself. This is true for individuals, as well as organizations. Societies do not change until the individuals in that society change. Externally-imposed change is inauthentic and does not last.
2. **Logical extremes.** It often proves to be insightful to take ideas to their logical extremes. Consider the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Taken to its logical extreme, it says that what I am doing to others, I am doing to myself. Or, consider God and my relationship to God (a.k.a., the Universe or Higher Power). If God is love and if I am a child of God, then I must be love, too. And, I am a creator; not *the* Creator (i.e., I didn't create myself), but I am a creator. I was created by my Creator to create.

Bridge Building Starts Within

The more comfortable I am within myself, the more comfortable I am *being* myself, the more deeply I can *connect* with others, the deeper and more substantial are all my relationships. How do I connect with myself? How can I become more comfortable within myself and with myself? The answer lies in dialogue, internal dialogue between heart and mind. [\[illustration\]](#)

When a thought or feeling arises within me, I can use that internal event to initiate a discussion between my mind and heart, an internal dialogue. I can ask myself these questions, in an iterative manner: What am I thinking? How do I feel about that thought? What do I think about that feeling?

Inner Dialogue	
Between heart and mind (a personal example)	
Thoughts	Feelings
• The world does not value my work.	• I feel unloved and unappreciated.
• I understand, those feelings make sense.	
• It has been a very long journey!	• Now I feel more depressed, no energy.
• I have tried everything I can think of.	
• And, businesses, and therefore alliances, are moving away from value creation.	• Now I feel abandoned, more frustrated.
• My ideas won't work: they are not true!	• Anger: I have been misled by God.
• Maybe ... I cannot do this alone, with just my own thoughts, plans and self-will.	
	• Grateful! I am being taught my own ideas!

*Dialogue takes us deeper,
to build relationship
on a more solid foundation.*

As I continue this inner dialogue, I am taken deeper and deeper toward the truth within myself. Our relationship with our heart is a portal to spirit, a portal to greater truth. When I can share my inner dialogue with trusted others, that external dialogue will continue taking me deeper – deeper into relationship, with self and with others.

In the illustration above, my inner dialogue took me to the point of realizing that I cannot do this work with my mind alone. I cannot do this work alone. I need to use my heart, and I need others.

Then, I am taken to the realization that the Universe is teaching me the very lessons I have been espousing all these years, saying, "Why don't you 'practice what you preach?' Why don't you live the ideas you have been espousing?"

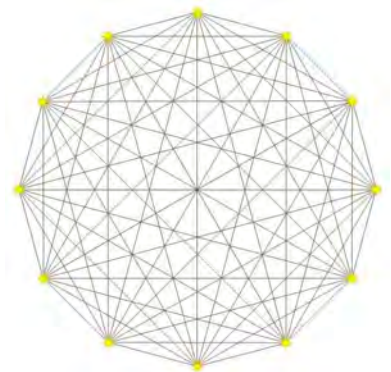
Oneness

This is the idea that we are all connected together, in a collective web of relationship. We are part of oneness and oneness is part of us.

*Either oneness is or it is not.
There is no in between.
What if it is?
What would that mean?*

Either we are all interconnected, or we are not. What if we are? How can we prove that we are? How would oneness affect our relationships with each other? [\[illustration\]](#)

We can observe the reality of oneness in our relationships, and that observation provides us with proof. Consider the relationship between student and teacher. Observant teachers often note that they learn as much or more than the student does. A similar interaction is evidenced when we are being of service to another. The giver receives as she gives, and the student learns as he teaches. We can accept the reality of these experiences without wondering how this happens.



Deep spiritual and religious teachings also point us toward oneness. Consider Karma or the Golden Rule. Perhaps the Golden Rule is sort of like the laws of physics. Maybe it's not so much a suggestion for how we *should* treat each other. Maybe it's the *law of the Universe*; it states the reality of how we *actually* interact. How I treat you and how I think about you, is a reflection of how I treat myself and how I think about myself.

*Perhaps the Golden Rule
is in fact the law of the Universe;
not a suggestion, but a fact.*

What I do to you, I do to myself, and vice versa. That seems to indicate that we are, in fact, one.

All We Are is Relationship

If oneness is true, and if oneness is a web of relationship, and if I am part of oneness and vice versa, then I am relationship itself. I'm glad I made that clear!

Relationship is an integral part of our identity. When asked, "Who are you?" – the most fundamental answer is "I am a child of God." I define myself based on my relationship with the Creator. Other answers also entail

relationship. "I am a doctor" implies a relationship between healer and healed. "I am an engineer" describes a relationship between ideas and objects.

*Without relationship,
we lose our identity and
we lose our purpose.
Without relationship, we die.*

Furthermore, if God is love, then I must be love, too. Love is relationship. God is relationship. Therefore, I am relationship itself.

The relationship that we *are*, is the ultimate and in some ways final "elephant in the middle of the room." It is all too easy to lose sight of this elephant. If we are present and observant, we realize that we are both the observer (observing the world around us, and our own thoughts and feelings) and the observed.

*We are the relationship between
the observer and the observed.*

Realized via Dialogue

We can be both the observer and the observed as we engage in deeply meaningful dialogue, especially in a group of trusted others.

Trust is the foundation of *every* relationship. Trust is a precursor to us sharing from the heart. Trust is also a precursor to us relaxing our minds enough to be present and just listen, deeply and holistically listen. And, greater trust is the result.

We build internal bridges and external bridges in dialogue. We remove obstacles and create the new in dialogue.

Bridging my Return

As I am returning from my journey, I have come to realize that I need to build bridges, and I need to *be* that bridge. How do I do that? I don't know.

One thing I do know is that when I am in a place of not-knowing, that is a call for dialogue – inner dialogue between heart and mind, and external dialogue with people on both sides of the bridge.

On each side of this bridge are mighty companions:

1. From my journey – mentioned above.
2. Awaiting my return – currently unknown.

The answer always lies in dialogue.

Identity

Human beings have three innate needs:

1. **Identity.**
2. **Community.**
3. **Purpose.**

All of these needs are directly dependent upon relationship.

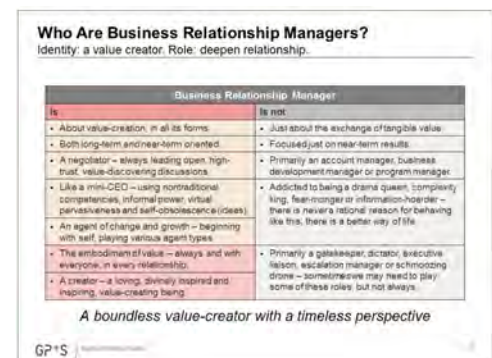
I believe the ideas I am sharing here, these gifts I am offering to you at the end of my journey, address all three of your deepest needs. They will help you deepen relationship.

Who do you think you are?

See the LinkedIn article [Who Do You Think You Are?](#)

Creators

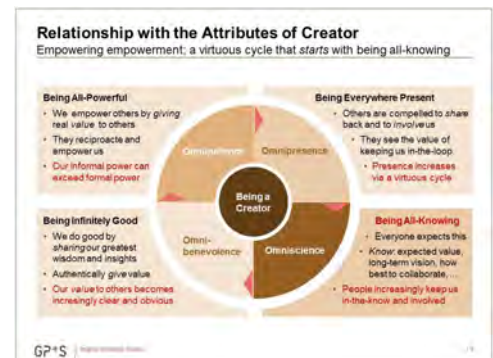
We are all called to be creators of value; that is our role in life. And, we can only create value in a relationship. The conclusion of [this whitepaper](#) is that strategic alliance managers (people leading value-creating relationships) would do well to think of themselves as being a creator; they are responsible for creation happening, in a healthy climate ([here](#) is a LinkedIn article on identity). And, as I see it, this idea applies to all of us, not just alliance managers. This heretical idea is actually relevant and helpful: [\[illustration\]](#)



You are the god of your relationship.

Obsolete Your self

This [practice of self-Obsolescence](#) relates to identity in two ways. First, in terms of my relationship with the traditionally accepted attributes of a creator (i.e., deity): omnipotence (all-powerful), omnipresence (ever-present), and omniscience (all-knowing). By freely giving of my knowledge (striving to obsolete myself), people naturally give back. This increases my knowledge, virtual presence and informal power. This is an amazingly empowering practice. Second, in order to discover my true Self (my true identity), I benefit from consciously striving to obsolete my lesser self (egoic self), by giving freely of my best ideas, by being of service. [\[illustration\]](#)



*self-Obsolescence is the
most empowering practice you can embody.*

See the LinkedIn article [self-Obsolescence](#).

Agents of Change

We are here to bring positive change into our world. If we are not interested in transforming our world in positive ways, why are we here? [This whitepaper](#) applies the personal attributes of Jesus, Gandhi and Martin Luther King to the role of strategic alliance managers (making them transformational). It is based on my 16 years of experience as a strategic alliance manager at HP, and it is derived from ideas in the book *Change the World* by Robert E. Quinn. (See [Appendix A](#) from his book, with an added diagram on negotiating. If these ideas resonate with you, buy Quinn's book.)

Be the change.

Community

*Where is your home?
Where do you belong?*

Being Part Of

We all hunger to be part of, to be home, to be in community, to return to God, to be in Heaven. Being part of a community calls us to have a relationship with that community. Relationships are based on love, which is deepened by listening. By [hearing the voice-of-the-collective](#), we can understand the community's problems, solutions to its problems, creative opportunities and long-term vision. This practice of listening to the collective can and has been applied to strategic alliances, spiritual communities, and relationships between communities and businesses.

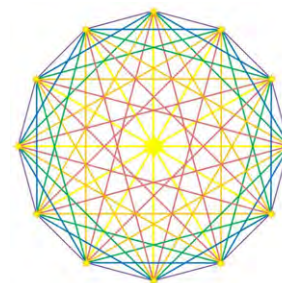
We are all already part of.

Woven Together by Relationship

Relationship creates the fabric of community. [Relationship is our most strategic asset](#). Relationship is the "elephant in the middle of the room" - hidden in plain sight, and so it is very often avoided. [All we have is relationship](#). When twelve people gather together, there are 132 relationships present ($12 \times 11 = 132$). [\[illustration\]](#)

A Course in Miracles describes relationship as a holy temple. Such a community is indeed holy. Can you see that? Can you experience that?

Be in awe of collective relationship's unlimited creative power.



Purpose

*What is your purpose in life?
Why are you here?*

Who to Trust

All relationships are founded on [trust](#). There is nothing more important in any relationship than trust. If we want to deepen our relationships, we need them to have more trust. How can we bring more trust into our relationships? Well ... we can "call" for trust via confrontation (not conflict); we can actually call it into the relationship itself. I've written an [ASAP Best Practice whitepaper](#) and three LinkedIn articles on trust: [Call for Trust via Confrontation](#) (jointly face [i.e., co-front] issues in the relationship, and trust will come), [Trust: an "Inside Job"](#) (it starts in your relationship with yourself), and [Trust: Is it Earned or Assume?](#)

What is your relationship with trust itself?

Trust trust.

Heal and Be Healed

What needs to be healed? Our relationships. How can we bring healing into our relationships? By [listening to the relationship itself](#); listening brings healing into a relationship. We can also choose to [see relationship itself differently](#). Choosing to see differently is a description of forgiveness. So, we have two healing opportunities: (1) make our relationships more healing via the loving act of listening, to each other and to relationship itself; and (2) forgive relationship itself - see relationship differently. Relationships are the source of our greatest challenges, and they are the source of our greatest opportunities, both. We need to deal with the challenges first (i.e., remove value-impediments) in order to allow the opportunities to surface (i.e., value-creating opportunities and vision). First, forgive, in order to clear the air, is the essence of the [2-Slide Methodology](#)TM process.

Forgive relationship.

Listening is Loving

Roughly a year, ago a close friend of mine asked me to meet with him. He said he had something that he wanted to talk about, something serious.

He started off by saying, "I don't want to continue living my life. Not today, but at some point in the future, would you be willing to help me kill myself? I worry that if I messed it up that my life would end up being worse than it is today. It wouldn't be ended, and I would be severely disabled." I was struck by two simultaneous feelings: shocked at the request, and honored that he would trust me enough to ask this of me.

We talked for about two hours. I dug deep within myself. I asked the Universe, "What can I do? What should I say?" A clear answer came to me, "Just shut up and listen!" So, I mostly listened. I listened. I did ask a few questions, but mostly I just listened.

Just shut up and listen!

Part way through the conversation, I agreed that I thought I could help him die, if it really came to that. Then, I listened. I just kept listening.

Toward the end of our time together, he made another statement, subtly but significantly different from his original comment. The new statement was, "I don't want to continue living the life I have been living." Something had shifted in him, primarily due to the act of listening.

The magic happened within my friend, as I simply allowed him to voice his own thoughts and feelings. He changed from wanting to die, to wanting to change his life. This change has lasted. He is now living a miraculous life, and, it has nothing to do with what I did, but with what I did not do.

As I see it, [love](#) is a noun (our ultimate identity) as well as a verb (the universal force compelling us all to grow); it is much more than romantic feelings. We can bring love (our true selves and increased growth) into our relationships by listening to and understanding the other (the other person or the other organization). We all want to be heard and understood; that process itself transforms relationships. When we don't understand the other, we can very easily misinterpret his behavior as a sign of deviousness, incompetency or lunacy. When we can see the world from the other's perspective, his behaviors make sense. We can also listen to, and, therefore, love the relationship itself; we can [hear the voice-of-the-collective](#) (see "Principles in this Methodology"). When we love relationship (by listening to relationship itself), it cannot help but love us back by sharing with us its insights, creative ideas and vision.

Listening is an act of love.

Love is always reciprocated.

Five Simple Truths

I mentioned these truths earlier, and I promised to talk about them more. There are five simple ideas (i.e., principles) which, when held in consciousness (i.e., when they are thought about), have as a natural result the deepening of relationship (i.e., they are spiritual).

These five spiritual principles have practical benefits in our lives. They also seem to span various spiritual and religious teachings. These principles (ideas) lead to practices (behaviors). A few of the most significant practices are summarized in the [illustration](#) to the right.

If you want proof that these simple ideas are true, look no further than your own life. Try them out. See if they help deepen relationships in your world.

Five principles and practices Ideas and behaviors	
5 Principles (things to think)	5 Practices (things to do)
Oneness: see others as Self; serve and be served; give and receive	Develop Relationship: focus on the intangibles and be transformational
Now: be fully present in each instant of time; multitasking is a lie	Be Lovingly Confrontational: shine your light with precision and love
We Create: our thoughts are a creative force; be very mindful	Focus Collective Attention: keep it focused on impediments, then value
Love: the universal force compelling growth, enthusiasm and inspiration	Self-Obsolescence: give away your ideas; giving and receiving are one
Trust: things are working out; trust the Universe; trust relationship	Negotiate Beyond Mere Win/Win: be the bridge in the business relationship

SIMPLE TRUTHS

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Oneness

We are all one. We exist together in a web of relationship that is more real and meaningful than the physical world we seem to live in. This oneness does not only exist amongst some of us (those who believe the same beliefs) and it does not exist later. It is present, here and now, amongst all of us.

Now

All we ever have is this present moment. Relationship deepens in the present moment. Creation happens in the present moment. Feeling bad about the past or worrying about the future is never helpful. And, multi-tasking is a *lie*. If you are texting or emailing during a meeting, you are not present. Be here, now.

We Create

We, together in relationship, create. *We* are creators. We are not *the* Creator (i.e., we did not create ourselves), but we are a creator. We were created in the likeness of our creator; we were created by our Creator to create. Creation starts in our minds, as ideas. Sharing ideas is a creative act.

Love

Love is the Universal force compelling us all to grow and to deepen relationship.

Love is also our identity.

Trust

All relationships are founded on trust. We can "call" for trust via confrontation (co-facing difficult issues in a relationship), and trust will come.

Trust comes from learning to trust the relationship more than the other person. Trust comes from trusting that the Universe is on our side. Ultimately trust comes from within.

DIALOGUE: THE HEART OF RELATIONSHIP

As I see it, we enter into the heart of relationship through the act of dialogue. And, dialogue *is* the heart of relationship. And so, dialogue is both the means and the end.

*Via dialogue we
tap into the creativity and power
that lives in relationship.*



What is Dialogue?

Whenever we approach the heart of any topic, words often fail us. Consider what it's like to deeply explore ideas such as love, our identity, and God. God is love. We are children of God, so we are also love. Love is what made us, and what we are made of. God created us, and we are part of God, and God is within us.

Our understanding and our ability to clearly communicate gets muddled as we dive further and further into these fundamental ideas. Such is also the case as we explore "dialogue."

Deeply impactful, and therefore creative, dialogue is more than simple conversation. The word "communion" also points to the heart of relationship. The following is an attempt to define creative dialogue:

- **WHOLEHEARTEDNESS** – Dialogue begins within. It originates out of an inner state of wholeheartedness, where the relationship between mind and heart is deep, clear, and open.
- **DEEP SHARING** – There is a willingness to share intimate thoughts, feelings and experiences. There is a willingness to be authentic. *Listening*, too, is fundamental to *sharing*. In order to share deeply, we must first listen deeply, by being fully present.

Listening is an act of love.

- **GROUNDING IN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE** – Deep dialogue is not about trying to fix, change, convince, or convert another. Ideas being shared are based primarily on personal experience, not so much on theory or the writings of others. When ideas from books are shared with others, they are most impactful when they are shared in support of personal experiences, when we have those experiences in mind, whether or not the details of those experiences are themselves shared.
- **TO DEEPEN RELATIONSHIP** – The purpose of the sharing that occurs in dialogue is to deepen relationship: clear the air, increase trust, transcend and transform obstacles, be more authentic, grow, tap into relationship's power to heal, and to tap into relationship's creative power. The ultimate purpose of dialogue is to become more effective creators.

Where is Dialogue Not?

The [illustration](#) below is an attempt to catalogue the breadth of dialogue (from internal dialogue, to interpersonal dialogue, and ultimately, extending to all of creation). It also illustrates the depth of dialogue (from superficial, to a new way to learn, to the creation of the "new"). It includes examples of dialogue, at specific points of breadth and depth. Admittedly, the content in this slide is subjective (my current perspective); its purpose is to stir up dialogue *about* dialogue.

Where is Dialogue not?

It is omnipresent

	Internal	Interpersonal	Groups	Societies	Creation
Superficial	Living in addiction	Idle chitchat	Talking about the news	Attack	Pillage the earth
More Authentic	Realizing the need to change	Starting to get real	Sharing experience	Growing sense of community	Realizing our impact
Remove Barriers	Transcend inner issues	Clean talk	Overcome difficulties	Remove borders	A sense of ownership
Clear the Air	Being open	Deeper friendship	A collaborative atmosphere	Emerging true community	Care for the environment
Have High Trust	True to Self	Healing & forgiveness	True negotiations	Effective peace talks	Dialogue-based stewardship
New Way to Learn	Open to a new life	Inner issues transformed	Unknown is known	Open to a new way	Prayer and meditation
Create the New	New Self emerges	New depths in friendships	A new home	A new way of being together	A new world

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As I see it, we are *a/ways* in dialogue, at some level. It is inevitable. This is similar to the idea that we are always praying and always creating. The primary questions about dialogue are, "How deep? How useful is the dialogue, for ourselves and for others?" And, the depth of our dialogue is inevitably tied to the meaningfulness of our interaction with our Creator, via prayer and meditation. Therefore, the depth of our dialogue affects our ability to create, our ability to be creators.

It has been my experience that when I have deeper dialogue within myself, I end up being able to have deeper dialogue with others, in groups, and with all of creation. In other words, as dialogue deepens within me (between my mind and heart), it naturally deepens throughout my life, in all areas of my life.

Why is Dialogue So Important?

Dialogue is *only* important if *any* of the following are true:

- Relationships are important to you.
- You would like your relationships to have greater levels of trust and openness.
- There are unaddressed issues, challenges or obstacles in any of your relationships.
- You want greater creativity, inspiration or enthusiasm in your life.
- It is important for you to be in an organization that feels like home, with a collaborative atmosphere.
- You are interested in positively impacting the world around you (i.e., changing your world).

Engaging in Dialogue

During my journey into relationship, I have experienced and written about several ways to enter dialogue in order to deepen relationship.

Meditation

The quieter your mind, the more you are at peace, the greater your connection with truth, the more you will be able to hear and understand what others have to say (including your Self), and the deeper your dialogue (within and without).

Ref: [Meditation](#) (a webpage on www.spibr.org).

Listening is an Act of Love

In most relationships, a major issue is often that *the other* does not feel as though he/she has been *heard* and *understood*. Often, just being heard and understood is sufficient. This need to be heard and understood applies to inter-organizational relationships, too. The other organization needs to know that it has been heard and understood.

Listening is the basis for taking dialogue and relationship deeper and deeper.

When you listen, don't listen with just your ears. Use your eyes and your heart. Use your entire body. Be present. Feel with your spirit.

While listening, practice complete and holistic acceptance. Just listen, hear and seek to understanding. Don't judge. Don't try to fix or change the other. Just listen. This practice can be applied in all of your relationships, including with yourself and with all of creation.

Ref: [Listen to Your Strategic Alliance: Why? How?](#) (a LinkedIn article). We can listen to a relationship (in this case a business relationship). Listening is loving, which is always reciprocated. And so, our relationship will listen to us, and it (the relationship itself) will enter dialogue with us.

Practice Inner Dialogue

As with many of the most important matters in life, dialogue starts within. It starts in your relationship with yourself.

*As within
so without*

The [illustration](#) to the right summarizes key insights I gained during a recent internal dialogue. I started off in a dark place, which got even darker. I shared this inner dialogue with a few trusted others. That external dialogue, where I shared my inner dialogue, brought to me deeper and deeper insights.

Eventually I ended up in a place of deep gratitude, realizing that life had put me in the precise situation I have always been asking for.

Thoughts	Feelings
• The world does not value my work.	• I feel unloved and unappreciated.
• I understand, those feelings make sense. • It has been a very long journey!	• Now I feel really depressed. Low energy.
• I have tried everything I can think of. • Businesses seem to be increasingly moving away from value creation.	• Now I feel abandoned, more frustrated.
• My ideas won't work, they are not true!	• Anger. I have been misled by God.
• Maybe ... I cannot do this alone, with just my thoughts, plans and self-will.	• Grateful! Life is teaching me "my" ideas!

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*Dialogue is the means
and the end.*

Dialogue is the heart of relationship, *and* I need to use dialogue to take me there. Dialogue is the path *and* the destination.

Be Willing to Do a Personal Inventory

The process of recovery from addiction (e.g., drugs, alcohol and other forms) calls for us to do a "fearless and thorough moral inventory" of ourselves. This is a dialogue within ourselves, with ourselves. We ask ourselves to describe our personal character defects, shortcomings and assets.

We write about this personal inventory, and we share it with a trusted other, typically our sponsor. We share the results of our inner dialogue with yet another person, expanding this process into another dialogue.

The details of this inventory are often very unpleasant, often secrets we've kept hidden from others for years. These inner issues have also isolated us from ourselves.

By sharing our inventory with another person, we focus shared attention on our inner issues. We are shining our light on these issues, and the result is a transcendence of inner barriers – our issues become neutralized. This is analogous to intense light being used in hospitals to clean surgical instruments. Intense light (i.e., intense attention) cleans things up. Such is the transcendental power of intense inner and interpersonal dialogue.

This practice of personal inventory takes us into deeper and deeper dialogue, whether or not we are recovering from drug or alcohol addiction.

With acceptance comes transcendence.

Practice Clean Talk

The process of [clean talk](#) (illustration and one-page description) is most useful when applied in close interpersonal relationships, especially when a difficult or emotionally-charged issue comes up. It can also be applied within groups, between organizations, and between companies (see *Hearing the Voice-of-the-Collective*, below).

The basic process is to share with the other your perspective about the challenging situation or event:

- "This is what I see." Seeing is used here in the broadest sense. It includes what you hear. Share what you have observed.
- "Here is what I *think* about that. This is my story and my judgment." At this point in this process, judgment is acknowledged and acceptable.
- "These are my *feelings*." Feelings are shared without causative blame (i.e., the other person did not cause your feelings; they are yours.)
- "Here is my *request*. This is what I would like you to do, instead." This process is not about trying to change the other person. They may or may not honor your request, but at least you have stated it.

The other person should acknowledge back what you saw, thought, felt, and requested.



The process can then be reciprocated, with the other person sharing what they say, their thoughts, their feelings, and their request.

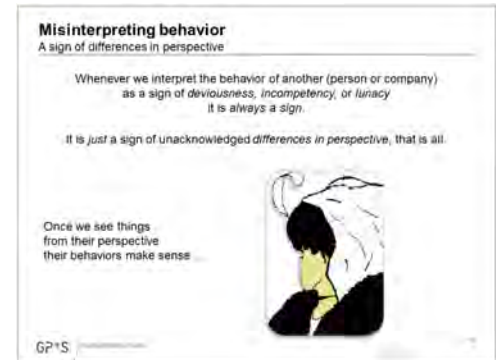
The result will be that each will have been heard and understood. Typically, that's the major issue in relationships: the other side simply wants to know that they have been heard and understood.

Listening is an act of love.

Overcome Divergent Perspectives

The air will become clearer in a relationship when each side's perspective is seen and understood by the other. Such is the value of clean talk. The process mentioned earlier allows you to see a situation from another person's perspective.

As it says in the [illustration](#), whenever we interpret the behavior of another as a sign of deviousness (they are trying to screw me over), incompetency (they are idiots), or lunacy (they are crazy), it is always a sign that we simply don't see things from the other's perspective. Once we see and understand their perspective, then their behaviors make sense. We don't have to agree with their behaviors, but now we have a clearer understanding of where those behaviors come from.



Use Confrontation to Call for Trust

Trust is the foundation of every relationship. The deeper the foundation, the better. The deeper the trust, the deeper the relationship. And, deeper is better.

Trust is the foundation of relationship.

Where does trust come from? How can we deepen it? I've attempted, over the past few years, to answer these questions in the following documents and in a talk.

- We *can* actually [use confrontation to call for trust](#) (webpage). This seems counter-intuitive, but it makes sense from a relationship perspective. When we "co-front" (confront or co-face) difficult issues in any relationship, focusing collective attention (our 'light') on the issue in the midst, not on the other, the relationship deepens and improves. We clear the air. We transcend the issue. Trust increases.
 - In 2007, I wrote the whitepaper [Building Trust in Strategic Alliances: enabling greater value](#). It was then selected by the *Association of Strategic Alliances Professionals* (ASAP) as a Best Practice.
 - In 2013, I gave a talk at Unity, Fort Collins, CO entitled [Confrontation as a Spiritual Practice](#) (35 min 22 sec, MP3).
- In late-2016 and early-2017, I wrote three LinkedIn articles on trust, each going progressively deeper and deeper into trust:
 - [Call for Trust via Confrontation](#) – an update on prior writings and talks (above).
 - [Trust: an "Inside Job"](#) – as within, so without and vice versa. I can deepen internal trust and see it evidenced externally.

- [Trust: is it Earned or Assumed](#) – have trust in yourself, trust relationship more than people, trust the Universe, assume trust is always there, and observe how trust naturally grows in relationship.

Have trust in trust itself. It comes from within ourselves and it lives in relationship.

Trust trust.

Be an Illuminating Mirror

The practice of *being an illuminating mirror* is a means for conveying deeply impactful gratitude to another. And, at some level, this gratitude, this expression of love, is *always* reciprocated, with both sides drawing closer to love. [\[illustration\]](#)

A sleeping mind must waken, as it sees its own perfection mirroring the Lord of life so perfectly it fades into what is reflected there. And now it is no more a mere reflection. It becomes the thing reflected, and the light which makes reflection possible. No vision now is needed. For the wakened mind is one that knows its Source, its Self, its Holiness.

- A Course in Miracles



See the greatness in another and reflect it back. Go deep. Be as open and vulnerable as you feel comfortable being. Be specific and authentic. Do it as immediately as possible, ideally as soon as you see it.

Be an illuminating mirror.

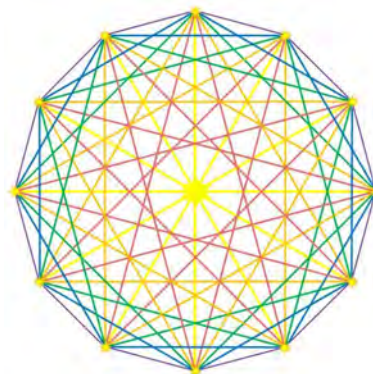
See the LinkedIn article [Express Your Gratitude](#).

Conduct Group Inventory

Group inventory is a concept from Twelve Step recovery (AA and NA). In a sense, it is an extension of personal inventory and clean talk, applied amongst a group of individuals rather than within or between two individuals. [\[illustration\]](#)

It is helpful for a group to periodically ask itself such questions as:

- What is our primary purpose? How are we doing at fulfilling that purpose?
- What is the level of trust within our group?
- How open and honest are our communications?
- How healthy and creative is the atmosphere?
- How deep is our collective web of relationships?
- What are the impediments or obstacles standing in the way of us having greater trust, more open communications, and a more creative atmosphere?



Hear the Voice-of-the-Collective

This practice may seem to be simplistic. Instead, it is simple. It describes the hard and transformational work that it takes in order to arrive at the simplicity that is on the other side of complexity ([illustration](#), the result of applying this practice in the strategic alliance between HP and SAP; see references at the end of this section).

This practice is about listening to the voice that lives in the web of relationships (see illustration in the prior section on group inventory) that exists *between* groups, organizations or companies (e.g., in a strategic alliance). As it says in *A Course in Miracles*:

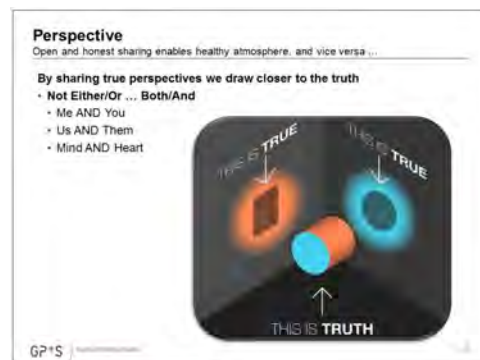
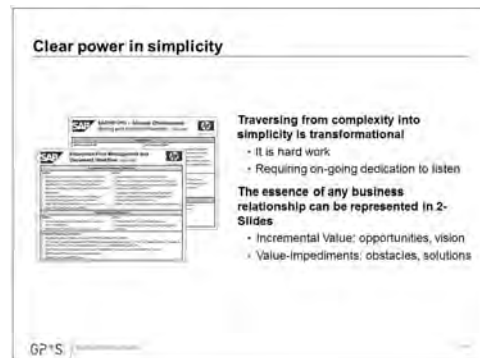
*The Holy Spirit's temple is not a body,
but a relationship.*

This is a sacred practice that encompasses the many temples that live in a collection of relationships. For example, among twelve people, there are 132 temples of the Holy Spirit ($12 \times 11 = 132$)!

I have been living and writing about this practice for nearly 20 years. I have experienced the power that emerges as we bridge insurmountable differences. I have used this practice to accomplish the seemingly impossible. I was originally exposed to the building blocks of this practice in 2000 at [The Program on Negotiation](#) at Harvard Law School. It was then developed and refined over a five year period, in multi-million/billion dollar alliances between HP and Microsoft, i2 Technologies, and SAP.

The fundamental (i.e., spiritual) principles that support this practice are described in *A Course in Miracles* and *A Course of Love*. Below is how I see these principles applied in this practice:

- **CLEAR THE AIR.** Be willing to proactively seek and find the obstacles that you have put up in your relationships that stand between you and the other. Seek and find the obstacles that stand between you and love. See these obstacles fully and completely. Then, consciously choose a way to look past them. This is the practice of forgiveness, it will clear the air.
- **HEAR THE VOICE.** Hear "the voice of the one in the many" and hear "the voice of the many in the one." Deeply listen. By hearing and understanding divergent perspectives, you will be taken toward the truth. Be guided by this voice; it will help you distill what you hear from the many to the one voice. It will help you *hear* and *understand* the simple essence of every relationship: [illustration](#)
 - **Obstacles, issues and challenges** in the relationship (i.e., Value-Impediments).
 - Paint a clear picture of what hinders the deepening of relationship.
 - Provide recommendations for overcoming those hindrances. How can they been seen differently? How can forgiveness be practiced in this relationship?
 - The **creative power** that lives in the relationship (i.e., Incremental Value).
 - Describe what can be created in the relationship.
 - Provide a clear, compelling and practical long-term vision for the relationship.



It is imperative that all voices be heard, especially the voices of those who are hardest to listen to. We need to hear from the so-called "opinionated jerks" because they provide new ideas, great insights and will help us make the most creative connections to new ideas.

*It is in the most unexpected connections where
the greatest creativity resides.*

Here is some reference material that you will find to be helpful:

- [The 2-Slide Methodology™: transformational simplicity](#). A 27-page whitepaper, describing this practice in great detail.
- [Transformational Simplicity](#). A webpage overviewing this practice.
- [LISTEN to Your Strategic Alliance: Why? How?](#) A LinkedIn article, providing another perspective on this practice.

Practice Effective Negotiating

I think of negotiating as having important conversations where we are trying to accomplish something important together, something deeply meaningful to both sides, something that is creative (i.e., value-creating). As I see it:

I am always negotiating.

At least, I always *want* to be negotiating. I always want to have deeply meaningful, loving, and impactful conversations.

I can still remember that when I attended the *Program on Negotiation* at Harvard Law, nearly 20 years ago, it was a spiritual experience for me. It brought into clear focus all that I had learned in prior experiences and training; it brought clarity to my work, and it inspired me.

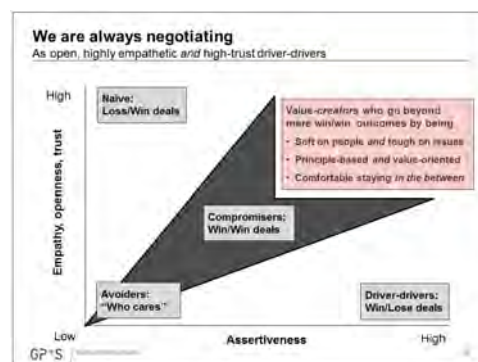
The most effective negotiators are not the prototypical hard-nosed driver-driver jerks, nor are they people who just "give in" in order to reach agreement (i.e., do whatever it takes to "get the deal"). It turns out that the most effective negotiators exhibit, in some ways, a melding of those two behaviors or personal attributes [\[illustration\]](#). They are:

- Soft on people (highly empathetic) AND tough on issues (driver-drivers).
- Principle-based AND value-oriented.

They are comfortable staying in the midst, living "in the between." They are comfortable being between:

- People.
- Organizations (e.g., between organizations, and between companies).
- Ideas (e.g., between each side's fundamental business objectives).

These great negotiators have discovered that it is "in between," in the relationship itself, where creativity emerges. This creativity may initially surface as breakthroughs during the formal negotiating process. It will later surface as new ideas in the relationship that was established during formal negotiations.



As within, so without.

As with most important things in life, it all starts within oneself. If you are interested in having healthy and collaborative negotiations with others, ask yourself, "How are my negotiations within myself, with my Self?"

The [illustration](#) to the right summarizes how I see the process for having the healthiest atmosphere for important conversations (negotiations):



1. **YOU.** It all starts with and within you! Be clear about your role and responsibility in the negotiating process. For strategic alliance managers, borrow a phrase from AA, and be "the single point of decision making and accountability." It is actually healthy to assume this role, and embrace your informal power. Have an open and collaborative relationship between your mind and heart (i.e., be in integrity, have internal unity). Be the bridge internally and externally. Be the bridge between Self and others. Authentically exhibit the attributes of trust, openness, vulnerability and [love](#).
2. **LISTEN DEEPLY.** Listening is an act of love (I've already said this a few times!). Don't just listen with your ears. Listen with your entire body, with your entire being; be fully present. Listen and acknowledge back. Let others know that you have heard and understood them. Listen especially to those who are hard to listen to, the opinionated jerks. They have nuggets of insight, and no one has been willing to truly listen to them (very often, that is why they act the way they do). If necessary, practice [clean talk](#). And, listen to the atmosphere, the [web of relationships](#). Listen to the truth that lives in the midst. Hear the voice-of-the-collective.
3. **MAINTAIN SIMPLICITY.** Take what you hear and distill it down to its simplest essence, but no simpler. Keeping things simple is hard work. To get to simplicity you must first traverse through complexity. But, it's well worth the journey. It takes you to greater creativity. For a strategic alliance manager, use the [2-Slide Methodology™](#) previously discussed to represent the simple essence of the relationship: remove impediments, create value. Then, establish just enough structure (i.e., bounded instability) such that creativity is enabled and not hindered. (See [Appendix A](#) from Robert E. Quinn's book *Change the World* for more discussion on the importance of bounded instability; see Desired System State on page 3.).
4. **LOVINGLY CONFRONT.** Now that you are "armed" with a clearer and clearer perspective of the simple essence of the relationship, you are empowered and inspired to increasingly clear the air. You realize that by dealing directly with difficult issues (co-fronting issues in a relationship), trust increases; the atmosphere improves, and new opportunities present themselves. This is an on-going and iterative process of clearing the air, uncovering unforeseen value-creating opportunities, and improving long-term vision. In a very real sense, this confrontational process *is* the negotiating process. You are negotiating (i.e., leading the way) to deeper relationship; this is true leadership.
5. **TRUST RELATIONSHIP.** Trust is the foundation of every relationship. In fact, it is the *relationship* itself you can trust, more than other people. You can learn to trust the wisdom of the spirit that lives in relationship. Like almost every other important issue, trust starts within you and in your relationship with your Self. If you can trust yourself, you will extend trust. The important thing is your relationship with trust. The health and openness of other people's relationship with trust is really none of your business. See the earlier section *Use Confrontation to Call for Trust* for additional thoughts and reference material on trust.

Negotiate ever deeper relationships.

See the LinkedIn article [Value-Creating Dialogue](#).

Be Open to a New Life

Personal success is based mostly on attitude and mindset, much more so than knowledge or skills (see [this illustration](#) for more detail on the factors that determine personal success factors). And yet, most people invest most of their time and energy in acquiring knowledge and developing skills, and most businesses ignore attitude and mindset, because it is so hard to assess and hard to develop. Nonetheless, it is the *most* important factor leading to your success.



Strategic alliance (business relationship) success is based mostly, if not entirely, on relationship and people (see [this illustration](#) for more detail on success factors in strategic alliances – long-term value-creating relationships). Yet, most businesses ignore relationship, because it, too, is so hard. They focus their energy instead on such things as strategic planning, financial analysis, and legal agreements.

The [illustration](#) to the right points the way to success.

The secret formula for success lies in the *ANDing* of personal success with strategic alliance success (i.e., success in long-term value-creating relationships). It lies in the intersection (see the prior illustration).

*Changing attitude and mindset
in order to deepen relationship.*

And that is how I define spirituality: the deepening of relationship – with Self, with others and with everything else (the Universe, God, Higher Power, ...).



*Spirituality is about
changing what is most important within
in order to improve what is most important without.*

Called Into the Depth

As I have progressed on this journey, I have noticed a progressive appreciation of and desire for deeper and deeper relationships, for dialogue and conversations that are deeply honest, that are heart-felt, and that begin to lay bare the hidden Self. In parallel, I have noticed a counter force, impatience with superficial conversation, idle chit chat, and shallow relationships. [\[illustration\]](#)

*I am being drawn
from the shallow
into the deep.*



Here are a few examples of relationships which illustrate the depth of which I speak.

- Twelve Step recovery (AA and NA) where it is clearly stated that personal recovery depends on unity, the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel, and recovery is a "we" thing. Group interaction is explicitly based on the sharing of one's own experience, strength, and hope.

- A men's group of "NA old timers" where we gathered together to openly and freely discuss spiritual matters (without formal Twelve Step meeting structure). We often observed how the ideas that were shared emerged, morphed and grew; they spontaneously took on a life of their own and "flew" around the room.
- Study/Discussion groups focused on *A Course in Miracles* or *A Course of Love*. Deep dialogue often occurs, as we collectively explore new spiritual territory.
- Gatherings, in-person and on-line, explicitly focused on the deepening of dialogue. Open, deep and unstructured dialogue is the objective. As *A Course of Love* would say, we gather together to let the unknown become known, to be informed as we inform, and to discover/uncover our true Self. Where does this transformational growth occur? In relationship.

I am attracted to the ever-deepening experience of oneness in one-on-one relationship and in a collective web of relationships. These relationships are both cause and effect of an ever-deepening relationship within myself, with my Self, with others and with the Universe.

Practical Spirituality

It's worth defining spirituality a bit more, especially practical spirituality. [\[illustration\]](#)

Practical spirituality is:

- Simple, not complex
- Useful here and now, not theoretical (e.g., not about later).
- The deepening of relationship. It is connective, not divisive.
- Serving, healing and sharing. It is not about blaming or judging.
- About being enthusiastic, inspirational and creative.
- A deep understanding of reality based on life experiences, in relationships.
- About reciprocity, experiencing giving and receiving as one, in the here and now.

Practical Spirituality	
Is	Is not
Simple	Complex
Practically useful here and now	A theoretical or academic debate
Connective – about deepening relationship – "we" and oneness	Divisive – separation – "me vs. you" or "us vs. them"
Serving, healing and sharing	Getting, oppressing and discouraging
Enthusiastic, inspirational and creative	Blaming and judging
Appreciating and celebrating	Preaching, converting and "saving"
Understanding based on life experience, especially in relationship	Understanding based on reading, in isolation; the lonely journey fails
Reciprocity, giving and receiving	Bartering, winning and losing

Can We Use "Spiritual" Words and Ideas?

We live in a paradoxical world. Organized religion causes much of our strife, with extremists and fundamentalists attacking each other. At the same time, we need more of the content that our religions teach: peace, love, tolerance, and caring for each other. Given how spirituality is often confused with religion, bringing "spiritual" words and ideas into this tense situation might cause more harm than good. [\[illustration\]](#)

I have wrestled with this issue for decades, and have come to the following conclusions:

- WHAT DO I MEAN BY "SPIRITUAL"? Principles and practices, ideas and behaviors, which have as their natural result the deepening of relationship, here and now. Spirituality is about deepening relationship with Self, with others,



and with the Universe (a.k.a., God, Higher Power or whatever word you choose to use to describe all); and, all of these relationships (with Self, others and God) simultaneously deepen, providing empirical evidence for Oneness.

- ISN'T THERE ANOTHER WORD YOU COULD USE BESIDES "SPIRITUAL"? No. No other word points to what is (a) alive, (b) lives within us, and (c) lives between us. I've explored others words like ethics, values, consciousness, and principles. None work as well as "spiritual".
- IT'S CHALLENGING TO USE "SPIRITUAL" WORDS AND IDEAS. So? Important work is challenging; that's why it's important. Whether or not you use these words with others (without) is not as important as acknowledging these ideas with yourself (within). As I see it, spirituality is like physics and calculus. It provides us with an understanding of fundamental principles – in this case, the fundamentals of *relationship*.
- THE PRIMARY ARGUMENTS FOR USING SPIRITUAL IDEAS IN LONG-TERM VALUE-CREATING RELATIONSHIPS (e.g., strategic alliances and partnerships) ARE:
 - It is about creation and creativity.
 - It helps us consider our relationship with the attributes of deity – being a creator ourselves.
 - It promotes a holistic (holy) perspective: seeing Oneness evidenced in the collective, a concern for atmosphere, ecosystems, etc.
 - There is an affinity between spiritual ideas and transformation, change, growth.
 - Spirituality opens us up to consider such powerful and helpful ideas as creativity, inspiration, vision, and enthusiasm. (The etymology or history of the word "enthusiasm" is to be in god, or the god within.)
 - It provides motivation and context for healthy loving confrontation – clearing up a relationship.
 - It focuses individual and collective attention into relationship – the health of relationships, the spirit that lives within us and between us.
- AM I TALKING ABOUT RELIGION? The answer to this question is both "Yes" and "No". Yes, if it is about (a) the deepening of relationship, (b) here, and (c) now. No, if it is about separation: debating, arguing or converting. And, no, if it is about history or the afterlife (i.e., not now), or someplace else (i.e., not here). Yes, if it is practical. No, if it is theoretical. Much can be drawn from religious teachings (and elsewhere) that can help us deepen relationship, here and now.

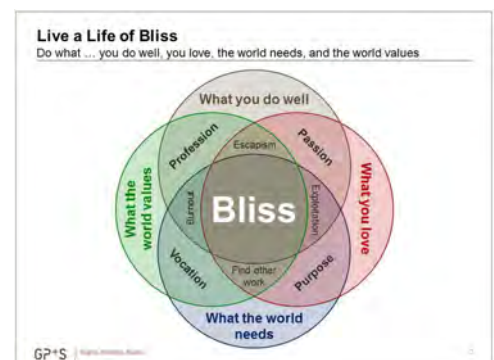
Live a Life of Bliss

The [illustration](#) to the right presents a perspective on living a life of bliss. The formula is: (a) do something well, plus (b) do what you love, plus (c) do what the world needs, plus (d) do what the world values.

*Dialogue is the means and the end
for living a life of bliss.*

How can dialogue take you to bliss? It will do that by enabling and empowering you to do:

- WHAT YOU DO WELL. No matter what your chosen profession



is, no matter what you do for a living, if you can bring to your work an ability to be more authentic, remove barriers in your relationships, clear the air, have high trust, learn in a new way, and create the new (i.e., be more creative), you will do your work amazingly well. It is inevitable.

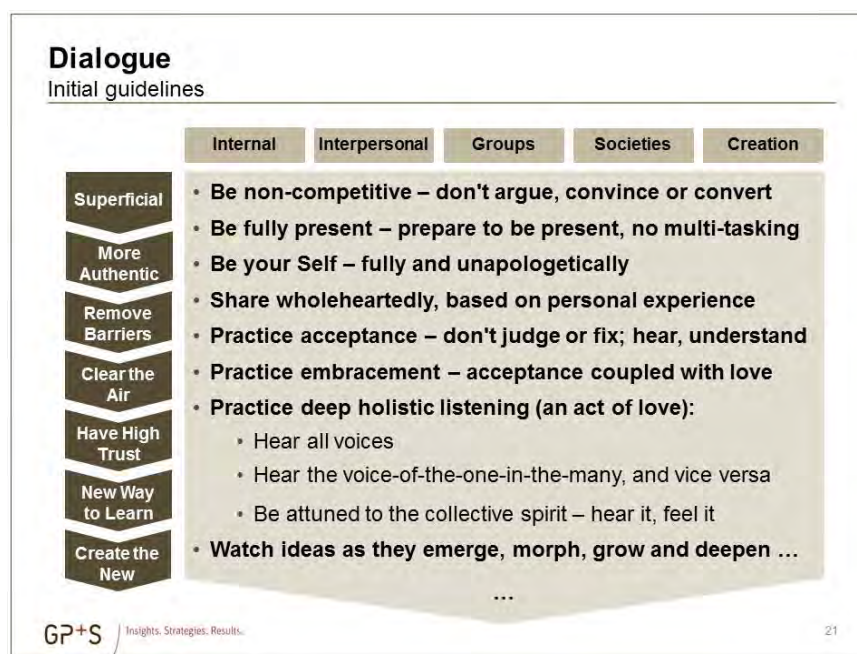
- **WHAT YOU LOVE.** As you deepen your relationships via dialogue, you will naturally draw closer to [love](#). You will, by definition, grow spiritually. You will tap into the creative power of the Universe. By entering dialogue in your work, you will grow to love your work, no matter what it is you are actually doing. It is inevitable. Your enthusiasm will attract others.
- **WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS.** The world desperately needs more bridge builders, people who can authentically and fearlessly enter into deep dialogue, and take others with them.
- **WHAT THE WORLD VALUES.** It may not be obvious that *the* world will value what I have been talking about in this document: the deepening of relationship, and entering deep dialogue, but *your* world will. You will attract people and situations to you that will align with the ideas that you will grow to embody, the life you are living, and who you are becoming on your journey into the heart of relationship. It is inevitable.

Dialogue is the means and the end.

See the LinkedIn article [Are You Living a Life of Bliss?](#)

Initial Guidelines for Deepening Dialogue

The [illustration](#) below speaks for itself. It is a summary of guidelines for the deepening of dialogue. It presents the overall idea that dialogue deepens in *all* areas of our life, simultaneously; when it deepens in *any* one area, it will deepen in the other areas, too. As we deepen dialogue within ourselves, we are also more able to enter deeper dialogue with others. As we open up, become vulnerable, and deeply share within a group of trusted others, we are able to deepen the dialogue within ourselves – we come to know ourselves more deeply.



The subtitle of the slide is "Initial guidelines" because the process of dialogue is about coming to know, learning in a new way, and creating the new. That process applies to these guidelines, too. As I dive more deeply into dialogue, as we dive more deeply into dialogue together, we will discover new guidelines; this is just an initial set.

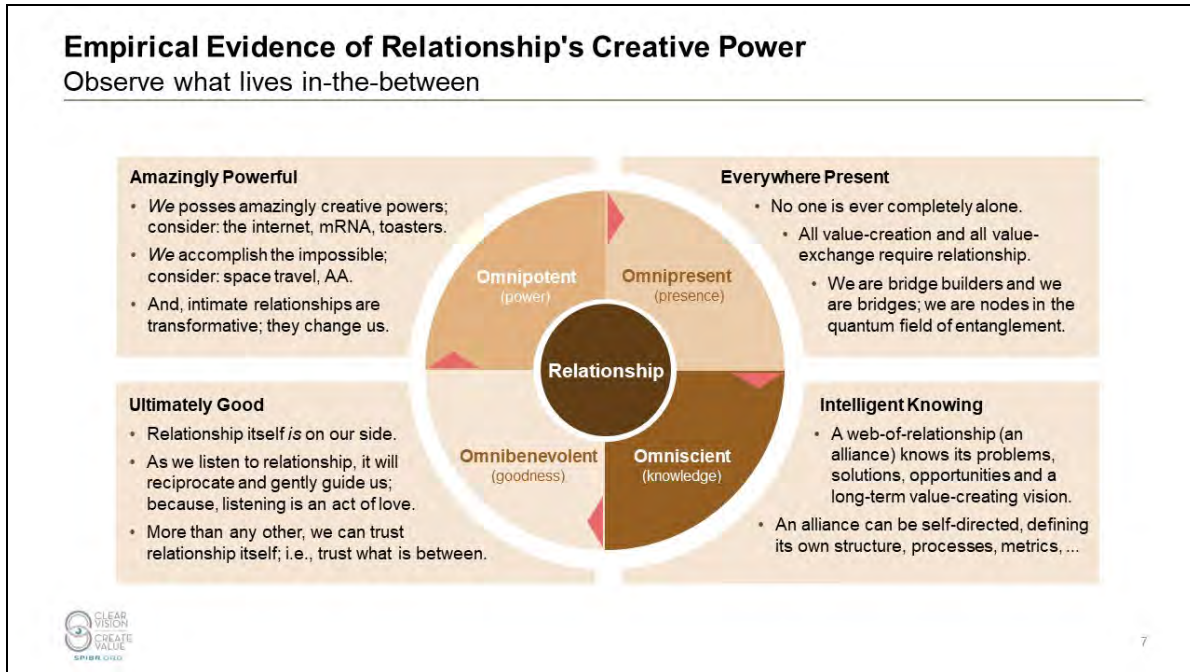
THE DIVINE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP ITSELF

The [illustration](#) below can be summarized in a bold and thought-provoking quote from *A Course of Love*:

God is relationship.

Think about it.

As I have reflected on the traditional attributes of deity, as discussed in the Abrahamic religions (omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence) it has occurred to me that relationship itself, that third something that lives between us, within us, and all around us, fulfills those attributes.



As we practice deep dialogue, we are taken closer to each other, closer to our true Self, and closer to God.

*"We shall not cease from exploration,
and the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time."*

- T.S. Eliot

*"Can you begin to visualize or perceive
your true identity as relationship itself?
And what of God?"*

*Can you unlearn all concepts and free your mind to
accept all relationship instead?*

*If all meaning and all truth lies in relationship,
can you be other than relationship itself?*

Can God?

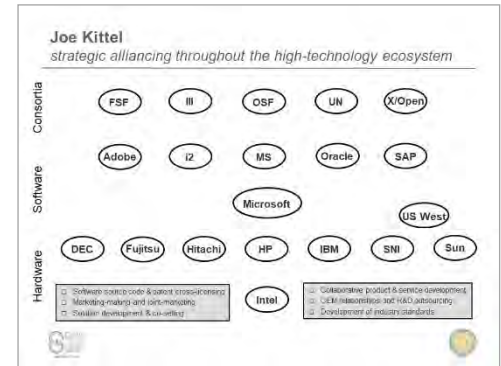
*Is it such a huge leap to go from saying
you only exist in relationship to
you only exist as relationship?"*

- A Course of Love

BIOGRAPHY



Joe Kittel has worked in the field of strategic alliances for over 35 years. For over 17 years, he *did* strategic alliance development at Hewlett-Packard. For the past 18 years, Joe has been focused on the practical application of spiritual (relationship-deepening) principles to help alliance managers transform their relationships in order to increase their value-creating effectiveness.¹ [\[illustration\]](#)



In 1989, Joe established his first strategic alliance – a multi-year, co-resident and collaborative-R&D relationship that provided advanced object-oriented technology into HP's C++ SoftBench product (a software development tool) and it enabled US West Communications (a major telecommunications company) to successfully migrate their massive Billing and Customer Care Systems from Cobol to C++ with a 10x improvement in software quality.

In 1997, he helped establish Hewlett-Packard's corporate-level strategic alliance with Microsoft, leading company-wide initiatives and negotiations in some of the most strategically contentious areas (e.g., UNIX/NT interoperability, object technology, and cryptography).² In that same year, Joe was a pre-founding member of the Board of the *Association of Strategic Alliance Professionals* (ASAP).³, assisting in its early definition.



At the conclusion of his career at HP, in 2005, Joe established the first strategic alliance between HP's printing business and SAP with a deal valued in excess of \$200M and an alliance that annually leverages over \$1B in HP products and services.⁴ [\[illustration\]](#)

In 2007, Joe established the first and only consultancy in the world focused solely on the fundamental transformation of strategic alliance managers and their alliances, SPiBR.org LLC.

In 2012 he published the book *Spiritual Principles in Strategic Alliances: transform status quo mediocrity into greatness*. The book has been endorsed by world-leaders in strategic alliancing and conscious

capitalism, and selected as a *Best Practice* by the Association of Strategic Alliance Professionals.⁵

At the University of Utah, Joe graduated *magna cum laude* in Electrical Engineering, with a focus on quantum electronics (semiconductor physics and VLSI design). He applies a methodical engineering approach to strategic alliances, spirituality and relationships. He seeks out and uses fundamental principles.



About our logo: We are focused on creating value in relationships. The incremental value and vision for a relationship lives *within* the relationship itself. Therefore, our first task is to deal with the issues, obstacles and impediments in that relationship that obscure value.

Clear vision, and then, create value.

¹ See http://www.spibr.org/Joe_Kittel_resume.pdf for (obviously) a resume.

² Go to http://www.spibr.org/970319_HP_Microsoft_corp_alliance_simplified_enterprise_computing.pdf for more details.

³ See <http://www.strategic-alliances.org>.

⁴ Go to http://www.spibr.org/HP-SAP_NetWeaver-HPDS_incremental_value_slide_award_PR_invite.pdf for more details.

⁵ See http://www.spibr.org/ASAP_Best_Practices_Bulletin_July_2009.pdf.