

# Interpersonal Relationship: A Socio-Psychological Approach

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**Abstract:** *Humanity is at the crossroads of independence and freedom due to the emergence of modern means of communication. This poses a threat to interpersonal relationships as individuals can choose to be islands unto themselves, Interdependency is what humanity is scripted with which is crucial for happiness and survival. Hence a socio-Psychological approach towards the study of the interpersonal relationship is adapted to define and enhance it.*

**Keywords:** Interpersonal relationship, Communication, Listening, Self-knowledge, dialogue, Trust, Conflict

## 1. Introduction

Dependency is what man is scripted with. Man, from womb to tomb is dependent on the others for continued existence. Berscheid & Regan (2005, p.3) say, "Unlike many other animals that are born relatively mature and independent, without a mother to care for it, or a father, or someone-anyone!-to care whether it lives or dies, the human infant will not survive. Fortunately, most human infants are born into a ready-made web of interpersonal relationships that provide them with the essentials of life". Some psychological theorists and evolutionists call this ready-made web of interpersonal relationships as "social heredity". Some infants' social heredity may be rich whereas some others may enjoy very little of it. In contrast to the infant's social inheritance, which ranges from very rich to very poor, almost all humans are born with an exceedingly rich biological inheritance that helps them make the most of the social inheritance. This is because man is ingrained with sociability making him a "social animal". This is also called by some others *the need to belong* - an innate drive to maintain a minimum number of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships.

It is a commonly accepted fact that satisfaction at work, at play, and in family life depends largely on the quality of relationships and loves. The interpersonal relationship has its influence on the physical and mental health of the individual across the life span. Web of well-knit relationships adds longevity to a person and contributes towards the survival and progress of the community or society. This article showcases an attempt to define, identify the components of interpersonal relationships and suggestions to enhance them.

### Definition

Before any further study into the interpersonal relationship is carried forward, clarification of the terms and the definition of it is a precondition. Etymologically the words inter and personal were combined and were introduced in a psychological sense as a concept by H.S. Sullivan (1892-1949) to describe "behavior between people in an encounter". The dictionary spells out the meaning of interpersonal in its adjective form: *of or pertaining to the relations between persons or existing or occurring between*

*persons*. Similarly, the word relationship stands to communicate the *condition or fact of being related; connection, or association*. A relationship in its strictest sense is possible with human beings only. Interaction is the essence of the relationship between two or more persons. Interaction means the way one partner influences the other which in turn affects the behavior of the other. It takes at least one other person to establish a relationship.

An interpersonal relationship is defined by Wikipedia as "An interpersonal relationship is a strong, deep, or close association or acquaintance between two or more people that may range in duration from brief to enduring." From the definition, it is clear that interpersonal relationship is dependent on various factors. A healthy interpersonal relationship requires the fulfillment of certain conditions. First of all the people involved in an interpersonal relationship should have common goals and objectives. Similar interests and thinking patterns among the partners involved are required. The relationship is further enhanced when individuals respect each other's views and opinions. A sense of mutual trust among the individuals draws them together and keeps them attached. Another aspect that plays a pivotal role in the interpersonal relationship is transparency and honesty towards each other.

An interpersonal relationship is so crucial that Powell says, "There is a persistent, if uninformed, suspicion in most of us that we can solve our own problems and be the masters of our own ships of life. The fact of the matter is that by ourselves we can only be consumed by our problems and suffer shipwrecks. What I am, at any given moment in the process of my becoming a person, will be determined by my relationships with those who love me or refuse to love me, with those whom I love or refuse to love" (1969, p. 39). For an interpersonal relationship to exist there has to be a certain amount of genuine openness towards oneself and others.

### Components of Interpersonal Relationship

An interpersonal relationship is an umbrella term that houses many aspects of human interactions. Communication, self-knowledge, listening, trust, conflict, and conflict management are some of the commonly accepted components of interpersonal relationships.

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### Communication

Communication is a vital input in building interpersonal relationships. It is often called the lifeline of love. Powell says, "Communication is an act of gift-giving" (1985, p. 137). It is the noblest way of giving the most precious gift of self to others. It facilitates the mutual giving of self as gifts to each other. Of all creatures in the universe, man alone has the capacity of using language as a medium of communication. Man is also capable of expressing his thoughts and communicating with nonverbal gestures and articulations. The basic idea behind communication is that a message is transmitted from the sender to the receiver with the sole purpose of creating a common understanding. Powel says, "Our word *Communication* refers to a process by which someone or something is made common, that is, is shared. If you tell a secret, then you and I possess the knowledge of your secret in common, and you have communicated it to me" (1969, p.7).

### Self-Knowledge

Poor self-concept and a rich interpersonal relationship are rather an impossibility. People who suffer from poor self-image are rarely able to build strong and enduring relationships. Self-knowledge is all about what Robert Frost has said, "Do not build a wall until you know what you are walling in and what you are walling out" (Powell, 1972, p. 52). People, instead of confronting the fears and anxieties try masking it that masks the inner possibilities and potentialities. When this happens there cannot be genuinely human and personal growth. Underlining the importance of self-knowledge for satisfaction in work and joy in life, Henry says, "I believe that the more you apply self-knowledge to how you engage your labor, the more satisfaction you will find in the very act of work, and thus the more joy you will find in life" (2015, p. 5). Knowledge of the self is all about the person in the interpersonal. Self-knowledge serves as the bedrock or the foundation of the interpersonal relationship.

The self-concept is the sum total of self-perception, comprising of feelings, thought, strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and limitations. Wood speaking of the origins of the self-concept says, "The **self** arises in communication and is a multidimensional process of internalizing and acting from social perspectives" (2016, p. 46). Powell says something similar, "What is more difficult to accept is that the image each of us has of himself is really the product of what other people, rightly or wrongly, have told us that we are" (1972, p. 45).

Man and his nature have been always the concern at the center of psychology. A man was seen as possessing more than one nature and always in a constant struggle with each of these natures. Harris quotes Somerset Maugham who says, "There are times, when I look over the various parts of my character with perplexity. I recognize that I am made up of several persons and that the person that at the moment has the upper hand will inevitably give place to another. But which is the real one? All of them or none?" (2004, p.9). The groundbreaking book on "transactional analysis" – *The Games People Play*, by Dr. Eric Berne, analyzed the social transaction between two people as having "transactional stimulus" and transactional response. It analyses the

different "ego states" namely, the *Parent*, the *Adult*, and the *Child*, of the interacting persons at the time of encounter. He let the world know that we keep shuttling between these ego states according to the need of the moment. The sign of maturity is when the adult has taken charge and streamlined the communications. The adult has to become assertive to outlive the past.

In the background of the transactional analysis Powel (1969), speaks of *accultured* self and a *deliberated* self. When one obliges others with the expected reactions, or when one falls into patterns that have been pretty much determined by the past, it is the *accultured* self that is acting. Covey says, "If our definition or concept of ourselves comes from what others think of us - from the social mirror - we will gear our lives to their wants and their expectations; and the more we live to meet the expectations of others, the more weak, shallow, and insecure we become" (1992, p. 52). As a person grows up in personal integrity and takes up the responsibility and acts proactively rather than reactively he makes a transition from a reactor to an actor or *deliberated* self.

For a genuine relationship, a transition from the *accultured* self to the *deliberated* self is essential. This process is often blocked by the trouble or the pain involved in the transition. Often one resorts to patterned reactions which Eric Berne calls, "games" depending on the ego state that is dominating. These games are manipulations to preserve the masks that one wears. This, however, keeps one away from true self-knowledge and honest self-communication with others. Powel says, "The price of victory is costly; there is little chance for game players to experience true interpersonal relationships, which alone can put them on the path of human growth and fullness of human life" (1969, 21). For Johnston "The goal of human life is individuation whereby one comes to discover one's true self" (1991, p. 83). If a wise man were to list his qualities on priority, self-awareness would rank high. All human beings wish to know themselves better, for a person who is self-aware is in control of his thoughts, emotions, and actions. According to Bennis, "Know thyself, then means, separating who you are and who you want to be from what the world thinks you are and want to be" (2003, p. 54). Self-awareness is purely personal work and no one can teach how to become yourself, to take charge, to express yourself, except you.

### Self-Disclosure

Harvey & Omarzu say, "Of all the processes that have been theorized to be essential to relationship development, none has been viewed as more important than the interactants' willingness to disclose information about themselves to each other" (Berscheid & Regan, 2005, p. 206). That speaks volumes about the importance of self-disclosure in an interpersonal relationship. Self-disclosure happens when the information otherwise kept hidden from others is revealed. DeVito says, "Self-disclosure is a type of information in which information about the self that is normally kept hidden is communicated to another person" (1985, p. 33). People guard themselves with a well-fortified wall from intrusion. People presume self-disclosure as a burden laid on by others. The fear of losing friends, though unfounded keeps them from self-disclosure. The fear – 'will people love

me if they know who I am?' keep us from opening ourselves. Powell says, "None of us wants to be a fraud or to live a lie; none of us wants to be a sham, a phony. But the fears that we experience and the risks that honest self-communication would involve seem so intense to us that seeking refuge in our roles, masks, and games becomes an almost natural reflex action" (1969, p. 12). Self-disclosure is a natural drive as a social animal that develops intimacy and contributes towards mental and physical health. Self-disclosure is both a revelation and a source of strength for individuation. "...when we confine ourselves to another we acquire some sense of dimension and growth in self-identity and the capacity to accept ourselves as we are" (Powell, 1972, p. 68). Reciprocity of self-disclosure has been documented by many researchers. Altman and Taylor proposed that "relationships progressed towards greater closeness and commitment as a function of the reciprocal exchange of information" (Berscheid & Regan, 2005, p. 206). Powell joins the same chorus, "two gifts are always in order: *honest self-revelation* and *sincere affirmation*. Being open and honest is like offering a gentle hospitality" (1989, p. 64). Honest self-revelation and sincere affirmation go hand in hand. Self-revelation brings transparency and blots out an ambiguity in relationships. When one has shown sincere intent through self-revelation, the words of affirmation are taken without doubt or pretense.

The fears of Self-disclosure may not be illusory, they may be real, but the advantages are numerous. Powell addresses this issue as he says, "Many of us practice the self-deception of believing that there is no one in our supposed circle of friends that can be trusted" (1972, p. 69). Real depth in a relationship grows when one finds a significant other to openly share oneself. Paul Tournier, the Swiss physician, and author says, "For a person to achieve his or her full potential there must be at least one other person with whom he or she is totally open and feels totally safe at the same time" (Powell, 1985, p. 5). It is a matter of decision and open-minded inquiry that will present enough of confidential and loving persons interested in genuine growth.

Often others' role in self-disclosure is underestimated. People go around with masks because there are enthusiasts who are ever ready to judge and tear people apart. It is in the presence of people who reassure; people shed their masks. "Only the reassurance of an accepting and understanding love will lure the anxious, the guilt-ridden and the supposedly inferior persons out from behind their defenses" (Powell, 1972, p.54). Self-disclosure is more a benefit than a loss in interpersonal relationships. Self-disclosure needs to be seen from a whole new perspective of a non-invasive attitude. Self-disclosure is a perfect and precious gift given to each other in a healthy interpersonal relationship. Powell dispels all shadows that could cloud the real understanding of it; he says, "My self-disclosure will make no other demands on you but to take my sharing into the gentle and grateful hands of acceptance, in giving you this gift I am truly giving you myself. It is my most precious, perhaps my only true gift" (1985, p. 22).

### Listening

Listening is a very important aspect of interpersonal relationships. Listening cannot be overlooked if one wants to

grow in interpersonal relationships. Listening is a very active process of receiving the stimuli and processing them to create a meaningful understanding. Listening just does not happen; one will have to make it happen. Listening is a very complex process. Wood has broken down the complexity by differentiating listening from hearing. "Hearing is a physiological activity that occurs when sound waves hit our eardrums. People who are deaf or hearing-impaired receive messages visually through lip-reading or sign language. Listening has psychological and cognitive dimensions that mere hearing, or physically receiving messages, does not" (2016, p. 163). DeVito defines listening as, "By listening we mean an active process of receiving aural stimuli. Contrary to popular conception, listening is an active rather than a passive process. Listening does not just happen, we must make it happen. Listening takes energy and commitment" (1985, p. 60). These definitions of listening prove beyond doubt that it is a very complex process taking one's energy and commitment to make it happen.

Oberg says, "There is an adage that we have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we talk" (2006, p. 37). One may not be wrong if he claims that the contrary is happening. Most of the interpersonal conflicts are due to a lack of listening and too much talking. If partners in interpersonal relationships were to switch to listen to more modes things would change for the better. According to the International Listening Association as quoted by Wood, emphasizes that "listening is an active process, which means we must exert effort to listen well. We can define listening as an active, complex process that consists of being mindful, physically receiving messages, selecting and organizing messages, interpreting messages, responding, and remembering" (2016, p.164).

### Trust

"There is nothing as fast as the speed of trust. It's faster than anything you can think about. It's faster than the internet, for when trust is present, mistakes are forgiven and forgotten. Trust is the glue of life" (Covey, 2004, p. 162). Trust means confidence in the other and the opposite of it is suspicion. Trust brings credibility to the person and requires no testimony by others. In the Gospel, Jesus says, "Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37). This comes in the context of calling God, or other human beings, or the holy places as witnesses to prove the stand or sincere intent. Jesus wanted that the 'yes be yes' and 'no be no' where people would ask for no more clarification. This status comes at the cost of credibility which is achieved by credible life. If people do not believe one purely on the words and require testimony that simply stands for suspicion. An interpersonal relationship is bolstered by self-trust and trust placed in the others as it is a vital element. "In a high-trust relationship, you can say the wrong thing, and people will still get your meaning. In a low-trust relationship, you can be very measured, even precise, and they'll still misinterpret you" (Covey & Merrill, 2006, p. 6).

"Trust is an enabling and empowering catalyst that is woven through every part of a strong, civilized society. But most of us are not even aware of it, or our dependence on it, until we lose it" (Covey, Link & Merrill, 2012, p. 25). There is a

deficit of trust all over in society. A cursory glance over the daily newspapers and magazines gives enough reasons to conclude on this fact. A distrust-ridden world is not a good place to live in. Imagine what it would be like to live in a world with a trust deficit! One reason why violation of trust is so damaging is that trust is such a vital principle, and, consciously or not, we count on trust to make our world meaningful and our relationships worthwhile. The cornerstone of every relationship is trust. When there is widespread distrust or suspicion the relationships are broken. One way to make good the trust deficit is to make a commitment and keep them at any cost. Often the lack of trust in others has its roots in self-trust. When we make commitments to ourselves in the form of making resolutions and do not keep them absolving ourselves conveniently it is only a beginning of extending it to others. Nothing affects us faster than the violation of trust. This trend is also found in all the units of society. The religious spectrum is often affected easily for trust plays a pivotal role in it.

Trust is the most vibrant form of inspiration and motivation. Covey, Link & Merrill say, "In fact, trust has become the *new currency* of the global economy" (2012, p. 13). When people feel trusted, they respond. Trust if it is perceived as a manipulative technique it will result in counter-productivity. Since trust is foundational to interpersonal relationships, it is good to figure out what makes trust. Trust is made of character and competence as Covey & Merrill say, "Trust is a function of two things: Character and competence. Character includes your integrity, your motive, your intent with people. Competence includes your capabilities, your skills, your results, your track record. And both are vital" (2006, p. 30). Just being morally upright won't make someone a trustworthy person; he should have a good track record of being credible, both in character as well as incompetence.

One thing we got to keep in mind regarding trust is; it does not simply happen. It takes time for consideration, maturation, and maintenance. Trust is the total of many aspects of the interpersonal relationship, like - care, concern, understanding, empathy, listening, etc. Though trust is built slowly, the maiden attempt to trust is easier compared to the restoration of broken or breached trust. Once the other feels let down or manipulated, the restoration of trust takes longer duration and sincere attempts than it took the first time. As the old idiom goes, "Once bitten twice shy" persons withdraw perceiving the possibilities of being betrayed of the trust. It is safe to sustain the trust at any cost than to lose considering the difficulty involved in reviving or restoring it.

### Conflict

Interpersonal conflict is part and parcel of every developing relationship. "Moreover, relationship scholars believe that conflict, in varying degrees, is characteristic of all close relationships" (Berscheid & Regan, 2005, p. 219). A breach in a relationship does not necessarily mean the termination of a relationship. Often, conflicts do appear due to expectations of interdependence from the partner or partners. Though at the initial stages of the relationship emotions play a greater role, as time lapses emotions make way for mature interactions. This shift from the emotional and sensual phase to a more mature phase of relationships is characterized by

expectations that may cause conflict in the partners involved. "Relationships do not simply continue to move towards closeness indefinitely. Most relationships reach a plateau in their level of interdependence. The point at which interdependence ceases to increase is thought to be marked by the appearance of conflict in the relationship, which impedes the further growth of interdependence. In fact, it is the growth of interdependence that has set the stage for conflict" (Berscheid & Regan, 2005, p. 219).

All relationships begin with ideal dreams and fantasies. This dream or fantasizing nature is the real enemy of a relationship. Dreams or fantasies are far from relationships in reality. People tend to idealize people and relationships. When the dream does not meet reality, instead of waking from the dream or refining oneself, people try to hate or expect too much from people and relationships. Valles quotes Solzhenitsyn who speaks of a character in one of the novels: "He had the greatest possible love and consideration for mankind, and this is why he hated so fiercely every human being that disfigures this ideal so horribly" (1988, P. 1). This is an archetypal example of the ideal interfering and ruining relationships. Conflicts in themselves are not bad but are found in all kinds of interpersonal relationships between parents and children, siblings, friends, lovers, and co-workers. What makes the conflict bad is the way we choose to respond to the conflict in a relationship. One can either both positively and proactively respond to resolve the conflict or react, reject and manipulate the situation. As conflicts in interpersonal relationships are inevitable so is learning to manage them.

All interpersonal conflicts center on either issues or persons. DeVito (1993) chooses slightly different concepts- content and relationships. Knowing the difference between the two and having the wisdom to differentiate the two will come a long way in avoiding interpersonal conflicts.

- a) **Issue or Content:** Issue or content is the subject of the conflict. The subject of the conflict could be anything under the sky like the object, events, issues, etc. that could be called the bone of contention. The easiest way to understand the issue of the conflict is to ask what the issue is or what are you arguing. Asking what gives a clue into what the issue or content of the conflict is. Content conflicts are usually manifest; they are evident and easily identifiable.
- b) **Person or Relationship:** This is rather a complicated and sticky issue. The easy way to figure out the person or relationship aspect of the conflict is to ask who is involved and in what capacity are they involved in the conflict. Here the conflicts are concerned not so much with the external object as with the relationships between the individuals-with such issues as who is in charge, how equal the partners in a primary relationship are, or who has the right to set down rules of behavior.

As long as the difference is clear and the parties involved in conflict distinguish between the issue and the person the resolution of the conflict is rather simple. Often people identify themselves with the issue and with self-esteem. In the enthusiasm to win the argument, they often fail to see the person involved and the status of the person involved in the conflict. When one perceives that he is not able to win over

the argument for whatever the reasons may be, will leave the issue aside and start attacking the person causing hurt and effecting deeper wedge in the relationship. Learning to differentiate between persons and issues is a must in an interpersonal relationship.

### **Towards a holistic and Robust Interpersonal Relationship**

Having studied interpersonal relationships and their components a few practical suggestions or recommendations to enhance the interpersonal relationship is imperative.

**Immunity:** Good atmosphere enhances almost everything. Hegde (Hirgan, 2016) speaks of a recent study in human physiology that revealed the presence of "autoimmune disease" in humans. The human body is made of over 120 trillion cells. These cells by nature are joyful. Every cell of the human body is made in such a way that each of them is in love with the other cell. Added to that, they are also made to be in communion with the cells of all human beings. When one gets angry or jealous of the other person the cells get a contrary signal from the central nervous system. When the cells that are made for love are told to hate they get confused. When this happens constantly over some time the cells lose their natural vitality and the ability to fight foreign bodies. They become susceptible to diseases since they have lost the immunity to withstand the attack. "What is it that most disturb the peace and harmony of our lives? It is our reaction to, and expression of, our inharmonious and destructive emotions, such as irritability, impatience, anger, hatred, lust, fear, envy, jealousy, selfishness, etc. All such emotions have been scientifically proven to produce chemical changes or toxins in the blood which poison the whole body" (Homer, 1936, p.43).

Nature has equipped man with the best. The capacity of creating heaven on earth is within the reach of man. Joy, peace, love, etc. does take very little effort and time as man is naturally inclined to them. Selfishness plays foul and makes space for jealousy, hatred, envy, pride, etc. Creating an ambiance of love is the first prerequisite for interpersonal relationships. Love is not an abstract emotion but a tangible experience. When one is in love with the other man is at its best.

**Sensitivity:** Sensitivity towards the other is the perfection of charity. "Charity says: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Sensitivity says: Do unto others as they would like you to do unto them" (Valles, 1988, p. 79). In life, one may be eager or enthusiastic about giving others what one thinks to be the best. But to understand what the other needs and to reach out to do what the other wants is sensitivity. This is a gem in the crown as it respects and cares for the dignity of the person. Without sensitivity, the charity could turn oppressive. Here the one who is sensitivity does not use the other selfishly rather lifts him "Sensitivity is the art of the small. Not the big sacrifices, the tall schemes, the heroic resolutions. Just small attentions, the loving detail, the opportune word. One look, one visit, one touch" (Valles, 1988, p.85).

**Interconnectivity and Unique individuality:** Ubuntu is a term meaning "humanity". It is often translated as "I am

because we are," or "humanity towards others" (Tutu, 2103). "A person depends on another person to be a person" – I need you to be me, and you need me to be you. This philosophy emphasizes the aspect of all humans connected by a bond of nature. No one can be happy when others are unhappy. Another implication that emerges from this philosophy is: individual identity is derived from being united with humanity. A person is moulded by the contributions of the other in the community and the whole universe. Each one of humanity has a role and contribution to everyone in the universe. No man can claim to be an island since everyone is connected by a knot of nature.

### **Encountering Communication**

Powell (1989, P. 112) sees communication as an act of love. If communication is seen as an act of love, it becomes an act of gracious hospitality to welcome another into one's confidence. Likewise, it is gracious of others to take the individual into the places where they live and work, and into their secret rooms. Communication seen from this perspective is an act of mutual gift-giving. But a cursory glance at the level of communication in human society will reveal that much of human communication is not personal. Sometimes people don't acknowledge others as people at all but treat them as objects. In other instances, though they do acknowledge people, yet interact with them on a surface level and often in terms of their social roles rather than personally. Yet at other times people acknowledge each other as people but don't get personal. With a select few people, communication happened in a deeply intimate way.

Martin Buber who is acclaimed to be a philosopher of interpersonality speaks of three kinds of relationships (Wood, 2016): I-It, I-You, and I-Thou relationships.

**I-It:** This communication is a very impersonal kind, where both the persons maintain a subject-object space which Buber calls "impersonality". They treat others very impersonally, almost as objects, sometimes may not even affirm their existence. In the extreme form of I-It relationships, others are not even acknowledged.

**I-You:** Buber identified the second level as *I-You* communication, which accounts for the majority of our interactions. People acknowledge one another as more than objects, but they don't fully engage each other as unique individuals. We do affirm the existence of others and recognize them as individuals within those roles.

**I-Thou:** Buber regarded this as the highest form of human dialogue because each person affirms the other as cherished and unique. "The other is no longer a person of impersonality, but a counterpart, a sensitized, correlative 'Thou'" (Powel, 1989, p. 41). When the interaction is on an I-Thou level, the outcome of such interaction is wholeness and individuality. Instead of dealing with them as occupants of social roles, they are as unique human beings who are known and accepted in their totality. In I-Thou communication, people open themselves fully, trusting others to accept them as they are, with their virtues and vices, hopes and fears, and strengths and weaknesses. Wood quoting Stewart says, "Buber believed that only in I-Thou relationships do we become fully human, which for him

meant that we discard the guises and defenses we use most of the time and allow ourselves to be completely genuine (2016, p. 14). Much of human communication involves what Buber called “seeming,” in which humans are preoccupied with their image and careful to manage how they present themselves. In I–Thou relationships, however, people engage in “being,” through which they reveal who they really are and how they feel.

**Impersonal VS Encounter Experience:** “In the language of existential psychology, “encounter” describes a special relationship between two persons. It implies that communion or communication of persons has been achieved. One’s existence is communicating to another existence, is sharing with another” (Powel, 1969, p. 41). Relationship that does not grow to the stature of an encounter cannot be truly human. Gabriel Marcel will call this kind of intimacy as “ontological communion,” where there is a real fusion of two individuals. Erich Fromm says, “We cannot love anyone without loving everyone more. If I can communicate with you and you with me only on a “subject-object” level, we will probably both communicate with others and even with God, on this same level. We will remain isolated subjects; others and God will remain merely “objects” in the world, but not experiences” (Powel, 1989, p. 43). When the relationship remains at the level of subject-object, there are possibilities of being manipulated for personal gains without due respect for individual dignity. When there has been no genuine encounter with fellow human beings, an encounter with God is almost impossible.

“My own experience, observation, and research has led me to believe that communication is the most important of all the sources of happiness and health. Communication is the essential foundation of our happiness” (Powell, 1985, p. 7). In responsible and mature communication there is no merging of personalities. Individual uniqueness and integrity are preserved without any compromise on individual identity. Each party should have the liberty to express their thoughts, think their thoughts, retain their preferences, and make their own choices. The beauty of interpersonal communication should be a shared celebration of mutual differences. However, the relationship is enriched by the generosity of self-disclosure. An interpersonal relationship is built on communication which is the agent of real change. It is the essential nourishment of human health and the only doorway to a new and happy life.

#### **Unconditional Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is the lifeblood of any human community. We cannot live together without upsetting one another, unwittingly, or even deliberately. So forgiveness is the vital step, and real forgiveness cements relationships, leaving them stronger than it was before the offense. Unlike what is often said, don't forgive and forget, but remember the forgiveness. Forgiveness as it is a virtue; it also could be subtly used to prove one's superiority or righteous attitude. In the Gospel, Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" (*Mathew 18: 21*). The question here is asked from a legal framework. Seven was considered to be a perfect number from the Jewish numerological perspective. Peter's concept of perfection was limited to the

fulfillment of certain criteria. This attitude also could come from the desire to be perfect according to a visible standard so that one stands justified. Jesus answered Peter's query, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times" (*Mathew 18:22*). Here the impression is not that of legal fulfillment but internal transformation and conversion. Forgiving erring brother or sister has to come from a heart that has experienced forgiveness of God and not by the want of legal fulfillment.

“Sometimes we have to stretch to say “I’m sorry,” but the almost miraculous effect it will have on communication and on our relationships will make the effort seem more than worthwhile” (Powell, 1985, p.182). The twin aspect of forgiveness is the readiness to apologize when an apology is appropriate and helpful. Admitting failures and asking forgiveness is a magical formula that removes many obstacles in interpersonal relationships. A sincere apology acknowledges personal vulnerability that dislodges the wall of defensive techniques that cause the death of dialogue. An apology is an antidote against the tendency to spend most energies and lives trying to prove that they are always right.

#### **Know Thyself**

“Self-knowledge is the pinnacle of wisdom” (Powell, 1989, p. 32). Self-knowledge comes at the cost of owning up personal responsibility and avoiding the habit of blaming others and situations and circumstances. The blamers fall prey to determinism theory. The theory says everything is determined by parental upbringing, heredity, and environmental constraints. Once stuck here, the person is removed from reality. Growth begins where blaming ends.

Paulo Coelho in the prologue to his renowned novel ‘the Alchemist’ narrates the legendary story of Narcissus. After having narrated the story, disagrees with the conclusion, and tries to draw another conclusion. The lake in which narcissus drowned is found weeping and the reason for it as it reveals is very touching: "I weep for narcissus, but I never noticed that Narcissus was beautiful. I weep because each time he knelt beside my banks, I could see, in the depths of his eyes, my beauty reflected (2016)." Not seeing one's beauty in the one we meet is a lost chance to know oneself. It is also an opportunity to see the beauty of the other. Every other person reflects the inherent beauty of the other. Harmony within is the essential tool to do this. Underhill quoting the Victorian mystics says, “To climb up the mountain of self-knowledge is the necessary prelude to all illumination” (2003, p. 49).

For Abraham Maslow becoming a fully alive human person is a continuous process – a self-actualizing process. It calls a person to preserve a balance between “interiority” and “exteriority”. As Aristotle said, “the virtue is a kind of mean”: the balance in life neither belongs to the extreme interiority nor the extreme exteriority. The introverts, on one hand, are extremely concerned about themselves making them think that the whole world revolves around them. On the other hand, extroverts always are bothered about the outside world and rarely reflect upon the inner world and its possibilities. Martin Heidegger points out two pitfalls in human growth: a complacent satisfaction that settles for that which already is and, at the other extreme, a restless activity

that goes from distraction to distraction in search of something beyond which he calls self-estrangement. Either of these are extremes that will not bring balance in life. A fully human person is someone who tries to balance between the inner world and the outer world or "what is" and "what is to come". Powel (1969) sheds light on interiority and exteriority.

**Interiority:** For him, interiority implies exploration and experience of self. These people are good friends of themselves. They explore and experience their personalities and are aware of the vitality. It also implies self-acceptance. These people are at home with themselves and are aware of their changing and growing selves. They are not in the race of becoming someone else but keen on exploring and actualizing their innate potentials. They are also realistic about their limitations and imperfections and take steps towards updating and perfecting them.

**Exteriority:** It implies openness not only to the self within but to the environment from without. Fully human people are in contact with the world outside of them. They are open to the voice of the world. They empathize with others sharing the suffering and joys of others around them. They are not defensive and cocooned on prejudice and bias, rather are people with broader or multiple perspectives. They outgrow selfishness to become self-less. The perfection in exteriority comes with the ability to give love freely. These people look out for ways in which they can be of help to others.

A fully human personality is in whom there is a good blend of interiority and exteriority. They do not play victim to the reactive behaviors of others rather choose to be proactive. The balance seems to be coming from the anchor within – the self-knowledge. They are "their own persons" neither manipulating others nor playing victim all the time.

According to Powell (1989, p. 36), life is a process. All people are on a journey to the fullness of life that is full of surprises and is meant to enjoy the trip. To be aware of two practices that serve as two legs to stand on is the secret of a happy life; first, joyful self-acceptance-an appreciation of our human uniqueness, and second, a willingness to assume full responsibility for every step and misstep along the way. Self-knowledge is an essential tool that connects people with reality. Without that, a man is like someone who is under the influence of a chemical substance or alcohol. Such persons jig into a self-deception-an escape route. He refuses to take responsibility for one's life and responds by distancing himself from reality.

### **Interpersonal Trust**

The ability to trust and being trusted by others is the hallmark of a mature interpersonal relationship. When one is perfected in these little endeavors, inches closer to trust unconditionally in God. Love demands presence and not presents. All gifts or presents are mere motion until one gives one's true self or presence in honest self-revelation. Giving oneself does not mean losing one's identity. Loving the other is never an abduction of the self. One could give his life for the other out of love, but could never deny the identity as a person. The relationship is never marked by

hidden agenda, repressed resentments, displaced emotions, acting out in adolescent ways that have no courage to speak out. All this comes at a cost of trusting and loving the other unconditionally. Powell (1978, p. 82) recalls Kahlil Gibran who said, "Unconditional love should not be conceived as making two islands into one solid landmass. A love relationship should rather be like two islands that remain separate and distinct, but whose shores are washed by the shared waters of love." It is an agreed premise that unless people agree to honor honesty and openness, they will never be sure of each other. Trust is the assurance that the other has the assurance of not being manipulated. Valles says, "the infinite satisfaction is to know that in my friend I have a person who knows everything about me, who can receive every confidence, keep every secret, increase every joy, soften every sorrow" (1988, p. 29). To have a friend to confide everything and to be able to stand as one is a blessing.

### **Build Reserves in the Emotional Bank Account**

In interpersonal relationships, there is something called efforts to sustain a relationship, and the lack of it causes erosion in a relationship. To drive home the message and ease of managing relationships Covey (1997) compares relationships to maintaining a bank account. We make deposits into the bank account to build a reserve and withdraw from it when needed. Emotional Bank Account is a metaphor that describes the amount of trust that is built up in a relationship. When we think of establishing a relationship with another person we mutually open an emotional bank account. We make deposits into the account and build trust reserves mutually. Deposits come in the form of courtesy, kindness, honesty, keeping commitments, etc. We make withdrawals from the trust reserves when we are uncourteous, disrespectful, overreact, ignore, etc. Basic assumptions are that the deposits come in small volumes but the withdrawals are dear. Unlike the bank account where withdrawals more than the reserve is not possible, in Emotional Bank Account because it is something to do with the emotion withdrawals could be larger than the reserves whereby there are possibilities of deficit balance. Once the trust is lost, it becomes a horrendous task to build it up again. With reconciliation and sincere attempts, both the partners may embark on the trust relationship again. But the deposits will come in rather smaller volumes compared to the first phase of the relationship as they could be perceived as manipulative techniques. The golden rule that could guide relationships without leaving a deficit balance in the Emotional Bank Account is, "Do to others as you would have others do unto you" (Luke 6: 31).

When there are a whole lot of things that matter, there are some major deposits that are crucial to relationships (Covey 2006). Genuine intent to understand an individual, attending to little things, keeping commitments, clarifying expectations, showing personal integrity, and apologizing sincerely when you perceive a withdrawal come a long way in building the reserves in interpersonal relationships.

When we love others unconditionally, genuine relationship is fostered. Love is the natural lifeblood of relationships. Sometimes the expectations of love may sound tough but it is not impossible. "It doesn't take blood to be family, it only

takes love" (Covey, 2006, p. 128). In an atmosphere of trust, the relationship thrives. Where there is trust mistakes are overlooked and in lack of it mistakes are amplified. The secret of a lasting relationship is to make large and frequent deposits of unconditional love. Since the relationship is mutual to deposit into the Emotional Bank Account of the other is to make indirect deposits into the personal account. Trust is contagious-and so is distrust. "Reciprocity works both ways: when we extend trust, we generate trust; when we withhold trust, we generate distrust" (Covey, Link & Merrill, 2012, p. 77).

### ***Listen with Empathy***

Interpersonal communication and listening are two faces of the same coin. If one cares little for listening, the other will hardly exist. A relationship may continue to exist but will not be deep rather shallow. The heart is traditionally called the seat of love but the easiest route to this heart is through man's ears. The overtone of this is to be found in the instructions of Yahweh to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. God gives to his chosen people the Decalogue. The commandment begins: "Hear of Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love your Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might" (*Deuteronomy 6:4*). Love in the heart is evoked in listening with the ears.

Often communication is seen from the perspective of making others understand or the expectations of being understood loom large. The clamor in interpersonal relationships is "why don't you understand". There is a basic fallacy in wanting others to understand because wanting to be understood lies within the paradigm of the other. Demanding to be understood is a way of saying "you open your mind for me". The handle of the door to understanding lies within and nor force or appeasement will fling the door open. The only way to arrive at empathic listening is to seek to understand then to be understood. Wanting to understand the other person is a way of saying "I'll open my mind for you" (Covey, 2014, p. 164). The deepest need of the human heart is to be understood. Everyone wants to be respected and valued for who they are and listening with genuine intent is the surest way to do that.

Listening ability adds effectiveness to individuals. Unfortunately, humanity is taught to read, write, and speak but listening is taken for granted. Humanity is not taught to listen from an individual's frame of reference. To effectively interact with others what one needs primarily is the need to understand the other. This ability comes from one's character or conduct that inspires openness and trust. The character is evident from the lack of integrity gap -the consistency between the public and private performances.

### ***Interpersonal Dialogue***

Valles encapsulates the misery of the globalized society as he says, "we live in our times the paradox of too much and too little communication, of talking much and saying nothing, of meeting often without ever making contact, of using and abusing the communication media without communicating anything. Dialogue without a will, conversation without depth, words without feeling, grammar without content" (1988, p.67). What he said simply

recapitulates the tragedy of superficial communication that is prevalent in our times. Genuine dialogue is a must in all interpersonal endeavors. Is genuine dialogue possible? Yes, as long as we continue to be human this is a possibility. Tagore opines "Just as God is the infinite link in space between the sun and the earth and the moon whose distances he heals with his presence, so he is also a permanent link in the inner space between man and man. The distance between man and man is infinite, and if that eternal bridge did not span the abyss how could we reach each other?" (Valles, 1988, p. 69).

Dialogue is not a simple conversation in which we try to slap our opinion on another. It is also not an attempt to be influenced by the opinion of the other. Dialogue is an attempt to understand the other and also to be understood by the other. Understanding the other does not mean buying the argument or selling the opinion to others. Dialogue is not meant to make people agree with each other. It is meant to make one accept and celebrate differences. The resplendence of nature is due to differences or variations in it. Man in his enthusiasm to find uniformity fails to recognize the beauty that exists in differences. "Pluralism is not evil and dialogue its remedy, no; pluralism is growth and dialogue its food, pluralism is progress, and dialogue its fuel" (Valles, 1988, p. 74).

Covey (2011) in his book *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Alternative* has showcased a fairly acceptable way of dialoguing and solving most difficult problems. Our dialogue in interpersonal relationships does not make headway because we are often pitched against each other in two alternative scenarios: my alternative versus your alternative, my team against your team, my opinion against your opinion. Since only one party can be right the other is considered wrong or even unjust. Everyone identifies himself with one alternative making it virtuous and rational and the other side lacking it. People tend to identify the opinion they hold with themselves and their egos. When someone attacks my stand I perceive it as an attack on my ego and my self-esteem. Dialogue is possible when we get out of this vicious circle of being hurt and reconciliation. The third alternative is a way of paradigm-shifting, shifting the way we see people and things. This synergy is four-step process.

***I See Myself:*** It is about seeing oneself as a unique human being capable of independent judgment and action. This first stage is facilitated by self-knowledge. Here the person does not identify himself with the opinion he holds. Neither does he feel threatened by the non-acceptance of the opinion by the other.

***I See You:*** I see a whole human being endowed with innate worth, talents, passions, and strengths that are unique in the universe. You are more than your "side." you deserve dignity and respect. This way of seeing or assigning dignity to others is built on self-discovery as unique and personal worth.

***I Seek You Out:*** It is about deliberately seeking out conflicting views instead of avoiding or defending yourself against them. Often different viewpoints are perceived as a threat, instead of seeing it as a threat a genuine effort is



made to learn or see the reality from the other's standpoint. If springs from the courtesy that says it a person with such character and intelligence differs from me, I need to listen. I listen emphatically until I genuinely understand you. Harris speaks of this position in his book *I'm Ok You're Ok*. The interdependence gives meaning to human existence.

The Adult is the only part of us that can choose to make the statement 'I Am Important, You Are Important'. I am a person. You are a person. Without you, I am not a person, for only through you is language made possible and only through language is thought made possible, and only through thought is humanness made possible. You have made me important. Therefore, I am important and you are important. If I devalue you, I devalue myself. This is the rationale of the position I'm ok - you're ok. Through this position only are we persons instead of things. Returning man to his rightful place of personhood is the theme of redemption, reconciliation, or enlightenment, central to all of the great world religions. This position requires that we are responsible to and for one another, and this responsibility is the ultimate claim imposed on all men alike. The first inference we can draw is *Do Not Kill One Another*. (1969, P. 158)

***I Synergize with You:*** It is about going for a solution that's better than anyone has thought of before, rather than getting caught up in the cycle of attacking one another.

Dialogue is not possible without working on the self. Working on the self and knowing that one is unique and is more than one's opinion is the seed ground for dialogue. When one knows one's worth he is facilitated to see the uniqueness and personal worth of the other. One sees his side of reality and understands it from his perspective. The other sees the reality from his side and perceives it differently. Instead of accusing the other of being blind and not seeing the reality as one sees, one grows in awareness to listen emphatically to the other as he is a person with character and intelligence. One makes sincere efforts to cross over to the other side and try to see the reality as the other sees. In doing so one would have empathized with the other person and his standpoint. This process of synergy is built on understanding the other. The motive here is not to convince but to understand and to be understood. Dialogue is the breath of interpersonal relationships, and without that, the interpersonal relationship will suffocate and die.

## 2. Conclusion

Humanity is on the crossroads of inventing itself a new horizon in terms of relationships. A wide variety of modes of communication like Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter and so on has influenced the human way of establishing and maintaining relationships. While some see it as an advantage many also see it as a disadvantage where warmth and genuineness is missing. Dependency and interpersonal relationships are threatened more than ever. Individuals are becoming islands unto themselves.

Tournier expressed the interdependency of human beings for each other's well-being saying, "How beautiful, how grand and liberating this experience is when people learn to help

each other. It is impossible to overemphasize the immense need humans have to be listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood" (Powel, 1969, p.5). The presumption that man is an interactive being and it is innate to him has played foul for a long time. Man is made for interpersonal relationships, but the reality is that it will not simply happen; we will have to make it happen. It will require awareness at the mind level and effort at the everyday practical living level.

The study on interpersonal relationship pins down a few aspects: first, interpersonal relationship is crucial to human society as the happiness of people hinges on healthy relationships. Second, it is crucial for survival. Third, everything one learns depends on the relationships initiated with others, and lastly, the development of the interpersonal relationship is a presumed conclusion.

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