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- *Human interactions are crucial for soul growth*
- *Choosing between enabling and protecting another in need*
- *Give witness by your actions, not with words*

God surrounds you and responds to your prayers with loving presence.

Much of what you have shared with one another relates to the issue of relationships—relationships with family, relationships with others with whom you are in contact. There is no way that you can go through life's experience without being shaped in some significant way by others. This is not to say that others control your life, but you are who you are in large part because of your contact with others. This growth, this influence, is a result most importantly of how you have responded and continue to respond to others, rather than the personality of another dominating your life.

Human life must be a life of interaction. You cannot travel along your pathway oblivious to the trees and rocks, the ground, the weather, others who share that path. You must always accommodate your steps according to what lies about you. When you were given human life, you were given that life not to live with impunity but to live in community.

This sense of community, this sense of belonging is an important part of all life. It involves relationships within the animal world and between animate and inanimate worlds. All that you are has some interaction with all that is around you. The importance of family is really the opportunity of exercising your sense of spirituality with others who are close. You may not identify that relationship as an exercise of spirituality, but that is what it actually is, for you exercise love. You exercise compassion. You learn to listen. You learn what it means to be loved, to be listened to. You learn to help, and you learn what it means to receive help.

The family unit is a great crucible that provides a springboard for the growth of your soul. All that your soul needs begins with the family. It extends outward. When there are difficulties, one learns to accommodate. One learns what it means to compromise. One learns to respect another point of view. One learns above all the imperfection of life. You cannot expect your experiences on earth to be characterized with constant perfection, for that is not the nature of life. You grow through your adjustment to imperfection, adjustment to your own imperfection and the imperfection of others. With that adjustment evolves a sense of patience, of tolerance, and from that tolerance ultimately grows the affirmation which we referred to earlier, the affirmation of another's value.

Your interaction with others, therefore, takes on enormous importance in your soul's development. Sometimes that interaction is characterized by great joy and exuberance. At other times such interaction creates pain and sorrow and a

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sense of loss. But these are the foundations which are so essential for your continued growth.

There is much to be said for the point of view that turns the responsibility of growth upon the shoulders of the one who needs it. There is considerable wisdom to that, but it is also important to remember that in placing responsibility where it belongs, one cannot then turn one's back completely on another, assuming no sense of further connection to that other person. Certainly that is not what is implied by placing the responsibility on the shoulders of the appropriate person. But there are too many examples throughout human existence of individuals, some considered great leaders, who have turned their back on those with particular needs.

The solution to this seeming dilemma is really one of seeking a way of placing appropriate responsibility where it belongs, but also recognizing your own spiritual responsibility to help in a way that you feel appropriate to give strength to the spiritual growth of another. Sometimes to enhance the spiritual growth of another, one must place another in a position where that other individual must swim on his or her own, for in swimming without aid, one develops strength, spiritually as well as physically. There are other instances where one does not have the strength to swim alone and needs some assistance in order to develop the confidence necessary to ultimately be totally independent.

It is a difficult path to walk down, making a choice between facilitating and protecting. Facilitating can be very positive, and protecting can be at times a negative experience. You cannot shelter others from a sense of personal responsibility and expect them in time to become responsible. It just cannot be done. You can help another understand what it means to be responsible. You can help another understand the benefit of being responsible. Then ultimately that time comes when one can no longer protect from responsibility, for that denies another the opportunity of significant growth. It is at that time that one has to lift one's sense of responsibility for another and place it squarely on another's shoulders. The timing for such a move differs from individual to individual.

There are many in life who seem unable to be responsible for themselves, and they seek to be told constantly what is to be done, what is the right thing to do. Part of maturing as a spirit, as a spiritual entity, is being able to function independently with a confidence that one is operating in life within the direct view of God's illumination. When one rejects the presence of God in life as a directing force, one travels the path in literal darkness, fumbling one's way through, stumbling over a root here and a rock there with little sense of where all is to lead. Developing a confidence in God's illumination allows one a vision of what lies ahead and provides the perspective necessary to be responsible for self. Those who are clearly responsible in a spiritual sense, doing whatever is asked

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of them or demanded with a sense of God's purpose, are behaving in an appropriate way because of their awareness of God at some level.

There are many who are very self-sufficient but are blind to the radiant presence of God. Their actions, although totally independent, are really not responsible spiritually. It is for each of you to further your development through the desire for spiritual responsibility, living your lives with a sense of this illumination that comes from God and is given focus by your guides. Your progress on the path toward spiritual unity with God and unity with all creation is marked not only by your own sense of spiritual direction, but also by your capacity to shed light on the path of another. This is not to suggest that you should tell others what they must do. Much can be gained by the example you give. If your light is bright, it will illuminate not only your path, but the path of your neighbor.

You enhance the life of another by the way you live your own. You lead, in other words, by your actions. Words are empty, but your actions speak of your beliefs, for the actions of your lives give shape and direction, and it is that shape or direction that ultimately defines who you are, and that definition gives evidence to the light within.

If you wish to have a positive influence on the lives of others, it is really through your own spiritual strength. It is through the exercise of peace that you feel. It is in giving witness to your perception of God in your life. This witness is not given by word. It is given by action, it is given by deed. These deeds are not necessarily accomplishments that can be measured and listed on a document. These deeds are frequently and often most powerfully quiet and to many, invisible.

How then can these deeds affect another if they are not visible? We may give example of a deed in the concept of compassion. You cannot go around saying, "I am a compassionate person. I will do everything I can to show compassion," for that is a conscious act that displays a character or characteristic that you value. True deeds that reflect God are not conscious acts. You act with compassion because that is who you are, not because it will show compassion. Compassion is the vehicle for allowing your light to shine upon the path of another. It is not the object of your actions. It is only the means. You do not label yourself as loving and therefore do something which will show you are loving. If you are loving, that which you do will give its own evidence of God's reflection.

What we are saying here is, in a sense, that whatever you do consciously to bring attention to a characteristic that you value is not done in the spirit of spiritual reflection. It is done motivated by ego or a desire for recognition. True spiritual qualities are not consciously exercised. They are transparent, but they shape your lives in the most significant ways.

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Your relationships, therefore, with others must be characterized by your perception of God, not your desire consciously to be compassionate or loving. If you feel God's presence, you will be compassionate, you will be loving. There is no reason to worry or to evaluate whether or not you're being compassionate or loving enough. There is no reason to be concerned about whether you appear to be compassionate or loving. These deeds are difficult to exercise, for in your best moments, you exercise them totally unconsciously.

It is essential that you keep your eyes focused on a spiritual meaning of what you experience in life. What is the spiritual reason that you may be experiencing a challenge or crisis? What is the spiritual basis of an activity that provides for great joy and celebration?

Relationships, therefore, bring about the opportunity to exercise your understanding of God in your lives. They cannot be constructed totally with intent. At its best, a relationship occurs because it is the natural conclusion to your spiritual vision. The warmth of your light can then pass easily to another and enhance and reaffirm another while your vision is still centered on the light of God. A spiritual life is a life lived unconsciously but with a focus on God.

Welcome those relationships with others, be they sources of joy or frustration or anger or sadness, and allow those relationships to be the workshop, as it were, which provides an application of your view of God within your own lives. As that view evolves, your relationships with others in turn will develop and strengthen and become more meaningful.

We pray for your growth. We pray that that growth will emerge as your vision becomes wider. We pray that your light will illuminate the paths of others as yours is illuminated by God's brilliance. Allow that light that you perceive to be reflected in all directions, and rejoice in those moments when you feel that you are serving as an instrument of God.

Our blessings are for that music that you play in life. Our blessings are for the sensitivity with which you view life around you. We bless each of you with God's illumination and loving warmth.

Amen.