

# Aligning virtues, not compensating defects, guarantee healthy relationships

INTERNATIONAL lecturer Ken O' Donnell gets to eat humble pie.

As coordinator for the Brahma Kumaris in South America, he once went to the head of the spiritual organization that he belonged to, complaining about a teacher in its center in Brazil.

"She had created havoc. Ninety-five percent of the people at the center were against her. She was angry and bossy, and she put off everyone."

O'Donnell was told off by the organization's senior yogi: "Stop complaining. You are defaming yourself. You were the instrument to make her in charge of the center in the first place. How can a creator complain about his creation? Stop defaming yourself."

Since then, when people's weaknesses arise, O' Donnell looks the other way. "When someone comes along and talks about rubbish or some situation, I am not interested, right? I can't be impolite—it's just that it won't register."

The essence of good and healthy relationships is keeping an elevated vision of people. On the other hand, that depends on the vision that one has for the self, which should be elevated as well.

"If my self-vision is not elevated, chances are I don't think about serving others in an elevated way," O'Donnell says.

Regarding the self with respect implies being attuned with the Supreme Being, who sees the highest self in everyone. In meditation, the Supreme's divine vision cuts through all the layers of impurity that have obscured the virtues in the soul.

"If I am stuck in my own dirt, it's the dirt of others that I will see. It will be a constant effort to sort myself out when I look inside," says O' Donnell.

He points out that transformation begins with aligning the essential aspects of the self: 1) what I am, 2) what I have, 3) what I feel and think, 4) what I do.

To support these aspects, one must have the aim to make a 360-degree turn around in character transformation. This requires a strong motivation to change.

O'Donnell likens the mind to a gallery, where a person leaves an impression—of being difficult, or of other unflattering characteristics.

On the other hand, no one is difficult in the eyes of God, who sees the value of each individual. "Behind the difficult, behind the ridiculousness of any human being, there is a poor soul – probably struggling and lost" says O'Donnell.

He elaborates: "When I am okay, I see the okay-ness of others. When I am not okay, I don't see anyone's okay-ness. So if I visit someone mentally, I think about him in the best possible way. We can't take sorrow from other souls. We can only take sorrow from ourselves," he says.

If one has the nature of being affected by other people's defamation or insult, that is taking sorrow, O'Donnell stresses. "If someone is behaving not so well, that is an accumulation of something on his part. He has developed an attitude from a history related to that. So he's caught up in himself and he's suffering! Instead of seeing the bad behavior, see the sufferer."

Discarding emotional baggage entails looking at one's situation, roles and history with complete objectivity. O'Donnell notes that our history or past greatly influences present karmic accounts. Instead of being fatalistic, he



**O'DONNELL:**  
"Detachment needs  
me to cut all the  
strings. Nothing is  
keeping me here."

says, we have the power to change our situation. Attachment to past issues certainly makes it difficult to move on.

Keeping relationships healthy also precludes feeling sorry for another person, says O'Donnell. "Otherwise your good wishes will never work. If you say, 'Poor things, let me have good wishes for them,' it will not work because you are judging. The good wishes will work only once you are able to see that soul without defects."

A harmonious relationship is cultivated when there is appreciation for the virtues of every individual. O'Donnell cites fear of the other person's arrogance as a common barrier to spiritual love. If one is arrogant and the other is submissive, he says, the way to neutralize that is to see the highest state of the other person, and then look at the self also in the highest state.

"Basically, the way we see others is 100 percent connected to the way we see ourselves and the way God sees us. So, if I can align these things, relationships are easy," he says. "If someone comes along to give me a test, I just have to go to another level. The secret of good relationships is not compensating defects, but aligning virtues."

On the bright side, a reminder from O'Donnell: "Five percent of the people around us are bound to be dissatisfied with us. But remember, we have to have 95 percent who are happy with us."



Every corner in the Center for Spiritual Learning provides opportunities for silence.

# Got time? It's all you need to treat yourself to a retreat

FOR a full year and eight months, I lived in a picturesque retreat center in Tagaytay City as a volunteer meditation teacher. More than the lovely natural vista and the cool climate, the joy of welcoming weary soul-seekers, then sending them off after a day or two with lightness in their gait, had few parallels for me. It was as if they were carrying away a new-found precious gem.

Seeing their beaming faces, I understood the great value in taking time off from the daily grind. A retreat is simply one of the best gifts for the self.

We live in times when people's routines are dictated by day jobs. When they do get a break, the nanosecond phantasm offered by the latest gadgets often becomes the quick, if deficient, substitute to the quality downtime that they actually crave.

Retreats allow us to unplug from mental and physical routines so that fresh energies of thought and new ways of being may emerge from some untapped well inside us. A retreat is a breather from the demands of living, the better for us to discern the more subtle patterns of life itself and stay attuned to them. When we take purposeful pauses, we find a rare chance to listen to that which is sacred in us. In a quiet atmosphere, we allow the deepest truths to come alive, those otherwise buried in rigid habits and conditioning.

A retreat gives momentary pause and helps us return to the roots of our being—like “reporting” back to the divine in us—so that we may emerge more resilient. It is not a matter of forever hiding away like a monk in a cave; just taking a necessary “me” time to rethink the journey and re-examine the values and principles that we hope to ennoble our lives by.

In a battle, an army retreats to regroup—that is, gather its energies and re-assess its strategies. We need to adopt this same practice of retreating back to what's real inside us, and check what makes us do what we do to begin with.

The silent atmosphere of a retreat place allows us to hear the timeless voice of our spirit so that we may realize its purest intentions. We may not be called to a new place, physically, but we may expect a shift in understanding

and awareness: What do I wish to change in myself? What attitudes and habits need dismantling and what do I replace them with?

There is a second meaning of retreat—simply, a joyful treat. No matter our age, we are perennial children bent on making life enjoyable, filled with wonder and newness. While usually associated with a somber mood, a retreat is really a chance to loosen up tight and hardened thought-patterns and, well, just take things easy.

Organized retreats in Mt. Abu, India that I join never fail to give me novel, creative experiences each time. I usually go with a big group of students of spirituality from all six continents. We follow a fixed schedule for meals, classes and meditation. Yet we also have personal time for walks by the lake, or shopping at the market. Some opt for physical check-ups at the nearby hospital. But the best part is – the playtime! Picnics with fun games are often held at the gardens called Peace Park. Within the two-week stay, there would inevitably be an evening cultural program with artistic pieces prepared by participants from across the globe. Once, a special outdoor dinner was held, with live percussive music throbbing under the lights of the night sky.

Retreats are often held in the countryside, in convents, seminaries and other secluded spiritual places; but they can also be done at home. I have attended very simple and personal retreats for a day which I myself would organize—my “me” time in the comfort of my own home. I would fix a schedule, with time allotted for contemplating a chosen virtue, reading inspirational literature related to it, and then sitting to meditate deeply on its meaning.

A half or whole day, a weekend, a week, a month—time set aside for a retreat is really flexible, according to one's schedule.

But wherever and however long you wish it to be, a retreat will always offer you a time-honored gift: a sacred meeting ground with the two most significant beings in the world – yourself and the Divine.

-Rina Angela Corpus

**Freedom from Fear, June 16, 9 am to 4 pm**  
**Inner Peace, Inner Power, June 28 to 30, 4pm Fri to 4 pm Sun**

**We'd like to hear from you.**  
**Write us at: [thepointfeedback@gmail.com](mailto:thepointfeedback@gmail.com)**