

# **The Heart of Relating: Does Your Ego Get in the Way of Relationships?**

By Carmella B'Hahn

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Every moment of every day, all of us are relating, either consciously or unconsciously, with ourselves, others and life. Our relationships can be a major source of sustenance – fulfilling our crucial need for connection, belonging, and giving/receiving love, however, quite often they are a source of stress.

Communication skills – the bedrock of successful relationships – are not on the mainstream education syllabus and children are generally left to learn to relate by absorbing the behaviour of those around them. Without conscious work on our part to change any unhelpful past influences, we will still be repeating them decades later, to be absorbed, in turn, by youngsters now in our orbit. How often have you caught a glimpse of your mother or father in the mirror of late? Do you also sometimes hear her/his voice (or that of an influential adult) coming from your mouth, unbidden?

What matters now is that we become conscious of any dysfunctional patterns in our relationships, so that we are in a position of choice.

Heartful communication is my passion and I have just completed a book called: *HEART OF RELATING: Communication Beyond Ego*. My interest began early, fuelled by trauma. I didn't speak till I was six. I was petrified of expressing myself... but then, one day, I was moved to put up my trembling hand when my school teacher asked the class who would play Mary in the nativity play. I learned my few lines without uttering a sound, at the same time as my young understudy learned hers. Then, when the big day finally came and the parents were ready on the edge of their seats in anticipation of a mini-miracle, I walked on stage serenely, dressed from head to foot in blue, and although somewhat stilted, pronounced each word clearly: "I have travelled a long and weary road..."

That 'coming out' moment of stepping on the stage and speaking was pivotal for me. I had managed to step beyond the fear that was covering who I was, and had my first

experience of communicating from a deep place inside. Communicating from the essential Self – what lies beyond our fears, roles, persona and ego – is central to this book, written 51 years later.

Let me share a few key things I have learned:

- **The biggest obstacle to creating fulfilling relationships is the EGO!**

When we believe that our ego, our persona, our thoughts, and the roles we play is all that we are, we can only operate from that limited identity. How do we recognise when we are operating from ego? The ego's two favourite pastimes seem to be comparison - (making ourselves either better or worse than others) and justification to prove ourselves right.

- **Observing whether we are relating from the 'outside-in' or the 'inside-out' out can be extremely helpful.**

**When we relate from the outside-in**, we feel at the mercy of what others think, say or do, or what life is presenting, e.g. we feel bad because it's raining or we're stuck in traffic. We are not in the driving seat of our own lives and we communicate mainly from our ego/persona identity. Failure, fault, blame, right and wrong, good and bad are all a natural part of our mind-set and vocabulary.

**When we are functioning from the inside-out**, keeping our integrity by staying true to our inner truth is paramount, no matter what is happening externally or what anyone else thinks of us. We perceive and relate from our essential identity beyond our persona – from the part that is compassionate, aware and sees a bigger picture.

- **Transforming dysfunctional relationships requires the humility to open to our blind spots and practice new ways of being – no matter what our age and experience.**

Humility can be more difficult with age as some of us don't like to expose what we haven't yet mastered. There is *always* potential to expand our toolbox and many tools are needed for the aspects of relating we encounter, which all need to be applied to ourselves first. (*Heart of Relating* takes 52 of the nuts and bolts of the way we relate – one per week – and offers a way of practising each one.)

**What are the three most useful skills for women, generally?**

- Learning how to either give of ourselves with a full YES! or to say No.
- Being fully authentic rather than attempting to please others.
- Balancing our own masculine and feminine traits and avoiding co-dependence.



**Carmella B'Hahn** is author of three books, a grief counsellor, communications coach and co-founder of Bowden House eco-community, Totnes, Devon. Further information on courses, the Buy One, SET One Free campaign, and to purchase *Heart of Relating*: [www.heartofrelating.com](http://www.heartofrelating.com)