



## The Difficult People In Your Life, by Sally Kempton

We don't always know why difficult people show up in our lives. There are some good theories about it, of course. Jungians, along with most contemporary spiritual teachers, tell us that ALL the people in our lives are mirroring what's inside us, and that once we clear our minds and clarify our hearts; we'll stop attracting angry girl friends, prickly co-workers and tyrannical bosses. Then there's the view "not necessarily inconsistent with the first" that life is a school, and that difficult people are our teachers. (In fact, when someone tells you that you're a teacher for him, it's often a good idea to ask yourself exactly what it is about you that he finds abrasive!) One thing is clear, though: at some point in our lives, most of us will have someone around us who is show-stoppingly hard to take. Sometimes, it seems as if everyone we know is giving us trouble.

So, one of the great on-going questions for anyone who wants to live an authentic spiritual life without going into a cave is this: how do you deal with difficult people without being harsh, wimpy, or putting them out of your heart? How can you explain to your friend who keeps trying to enlist you in service of her own dramas, that you don't want to be part of her latest scenario of mistrust and betrayal -- and still remain friends? How do you handle the boss whose tantrums terrorize the whole office, or the co-worker who bursts into tears several times a week and accuses you of being abrupt when all you're trying to do is get down to business?

More to the point, what can you do when the same sorts of difficult people and situations keep showing up again and again in your life? Should you chalk it up to karma? Should you find ways to resolve it through discussion or even pre-emptive action? Or should you take the truly challenging view that the people in your life who seem harsh or clingy or annoying are actually reflections of your own disowned, or shadow tendencies? In other words, is it really true that we project onto other people the qualities in ourselves that we dislike or disallow, and then condemn in someone else the traits we reject in ourselves? Does dealing with difficult people have to begin with finding out what you might need to work on in yourself?

The short yogic answer here is "Yes." Obviously, that doesn't mean you should overlook other people's anti-social behavior. (Owning your own part in a difficult relationship is not the same thing as wimping out of a confrontation!) Moreover, some relationships are so difficult that the best way to change them is to leave. But here's the bottom line: Try as we will, we can't control other people's

personality and behavior. Our real power lies in our ability to work on ourselves.

This, of course, is Yoga 101. We all "know" it, yet when we're in the crunch of relational malfunction, it's often the first thing we forget. So, here it is again: your own inner state is your only platform for dealing successfully with other people. Not even the best interpersonal technique will work if you do it from a fearful, judgmental, or angry state of mind. Your own open and empowered state is the fulcrum, the power point, from which we can begin to move the world. [...]

After all, what makes someone difficult? " Essentially, it's their energy. We don't have to be students of quantum field theory or Buddhist metaphysics to sense how much the energies around us affect our moods and feelings. " What makes someone tough for you to take? Basically, it has to do with how your energies interact with theirs. Every one of us is at our core an energetic bundle. What we call our personality is actually made up of many layers of energy -- soft, tender, vulnerable energies as well as powerful, controlling or prickly energies. We have our wild and gnarly energies, our kindly energies, our free energies and our constricted, contracted ones.

These energies, expressing themselves through our bodies, thoughts, and emotions, and minds, manifest as our specific personality signature at any given moment. What we see on the surface, in someone's body language and facial expressions, is the sum of the energies that are operating in them. As we speak, it's the energy behind our words that most deeply impacts others.

The beginning of change, then, is learning how to recognize and modulate our own energy patterns. The more awareness we have -- that is, the more we are able to stand aside and witness our personal energies of thought and feeling and (rather than identifying with them) "the easier it is to work with our own energies. This takes practice. Most people don't start out with a highly developed awareness of their own energy or the way it impacts others -- and even fewer of us know how to change the way our energies work together."