

# **THE SPECTRUM AS THINKING AID**

**or**

*How Would I Describe My Effort ?*

**by**

**Alexa**

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**INTERVIEWER**

*Congratulations Jimmy! on winning The Coalite Matchplay Championship and the cheque for £50,000. Does this mean that you're finally going to win The World Championship that you should have won eight or nine years ago?*

**JIMMY WHITE**

*Well, I've been putting the hours in. I hope so. I've been practising four or five hours a day – not just knocking the balls in the air.*

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## INTRODUCTION: THE COLOUR OF CERTAINTY

A Riddle? Consider Roygbiv: or should it be Roy G. Biv?  
Who is he or she? A friend of Phlebas? Or what is it?

**Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain.**

That's no help: and frankly, My Dear, I don't *give* a Saddam! Either you *see* it or you don't! Perhaps you weren't taught that way, didn't learn it like this. Here's a clue!

**Red Orange Yellow Green Blue Indigo Violet**

Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!! Yes, now you see!

As a very, lickle child one is shown the colours and told the words: and then, sometime later, one is shown the written words. Though one might learn the words, spoken and written, without actually seeing the colour very often. It is quite rare to meet Indigo. At some point at home or at school one is shown, through a rainbow and through a prism, the way these colours are *connected* in something called a *spectrum*. One also may be taught how to remember the colours in the order they appear in the spectrum – the mnemonic ROYGBIV.

Most people can distinguish between these seven colours. With attention and patience they can learn to distinguish several other colours or, to put it another way, shades of colours. Some people are credited with having 'created' new colours eg *Dufy blue*. And nowadays, through computers, it is possible to distinguish thousands of colours.

Jaundiced-vision is a medical condition in which pale dirty yellow overlays one's perception of all the colours. The sick individual might have a good memory of healthier days when she had clean precise perception of colour: and she hopes to regain this ability very soon. Some people suffer from what is called genetic 'colour blindness'. We commonly say 'suffer': but it is easy to imagine such a person getting through life alright. The world looks alright and feels alright to them, they feel comfortable and happy. But gradually they realise that other people are able to make distinctions they are not capable of: that what they see as uniformly green, others see as streaked with red. This inability may be of no consequence if one is not interested in painting: but it will prevent one from becoming an airline pilot: or a telephone engineer (only just!)

But imagine this 'colour blind' person in an Art Gallery, describing a Raphael or a Monet or even a Pollock. If she were to say that the distinction she is unable to make is '*unimportant*' because she '*can see what it is about and what it means*', she would be

laughed at by those art-scholars with full-spectrum vision. It is of course possible for her to learn the words for shades she can't see, and also the position they appear on the canvas.

## FAVOURED BOYS

And so with sound. **Do Ray Me So Far Lah Te Do**. I know the words. I don't know if there is a mnemonic apart from the one sung by Julie Andrews. I do know the other music mnemonic that goes: **Every Good Boy Deserves Favour**. But I am too dumb a boy to be favoured. Not only can I not reproduce a note I have just heard, I cannot even distinguish them clearly.

All human babies are born with perfect pitch and an ability to recognise and imitate any human sound in any language. Within the first year this ability weakens as the child comes to concentrate on one or two languages. But even an adult with a gift for many languages and who retains perfect pitch cannot hear or distinguish – with the human ear alone – sounds a dog or a bat can hear. Again, humans can use machines to extend the spectrum of sounds they can experience and recognise.

## THE LINE OF HUMILITY AND INTELLECTUAL GRACE

It is a maturational marker, a sign of being grown up, that one **accepts quietly and with dignity** that some other people can distinguish parts or elements on a spectrum – of whatever kind – that **one just can't** see or hear or understand yet. Sometimes one might not even know that a particular experience, or the idea describing that experience, falls in a particular place on a particular spectrum: that there connections between this experience & idea and other experiences and ideas.

The next marker, is how one solves the **moral puzzle** of one's obvious ignorance. Either one **tries to learn** the new words for parts of the spectrum one can't understand, and also hopes to have the experiences that goes with the new words: OR one decides one **can't be bothered** to do all that learning: but one **will never mock or insult** those who know and experience more. What one will never do is try to tear down someone else's spectrums or spectra!

What follow are some spectra. Dear Reader be honest, with yourself. Tell yourself, if not me, how many of these you knew: all the words, and any of the experiences.

Adolescence is a time when grown-ups will be throwing labels at you, just at the very moment you are unsure of your identity : and how to describe yourself : and if your efforts define who you are? It is worth thinking about labels.

## SECTION 1 : WRITING

There are two types of writing tasks:

**1 : PERSONAL** : shown to only a very few people.

**2 : IMPERSONAL** : what may be seen by anyone.

1: There are two styles of *Personal Writing*

### 1A : UNSTRUCTURED

This is completely unstructured, free-flow, rambling & utterly unconcerned about grammar and readability: eg certain kinds of private notes & diaries : or passionate statements & letters to others: expressing admiration, love, annoyance, anger, hate.....

### 1B : STRUCTURED

This kind of writing may begin like the above: but then some structure – order, style, control, grammar, spell-check, is imposed on the flood of first thoughts and feelings.

It may be clever and rich vernacular – rhyming slang, witty swearing insults etc. Or it may be very plain, unambiguous, and absolutely clear – as in law and science. Or it may be highly allusive – referring to other writing – literary or scientific. At its most structured, such writing becomes Art –high prose or poetry.

2: There are two contexts or reasons for *Impersonal Writing*

### 2A: REQUIRED TASK : WORK : (TO GET THE MONEY TO LIVE)

(i) STUDYING to get a job.

(ii) TRAINING on the job one has got.

### 2B : DESIRED/CHOSEN TASK : PLAY (TO GET JOY FOR ONESELF & OTHERS)

(i) LEARNING a new subject for its own sake, for the joy of it.

(iii) CREATING/EXPRESSING oneself in the new subject, for the joy of it.

## THE TWO BASIC STAGES OF ALL WRITING ARE LEARNING & CREATING

Before one can *create* in a certain kind of impersonal writing – whether for work or for play – one must *learn how* that kind of writing is done by the community of writers who do that kind of writing.

Obviously there are connections and overlaps between the categories above.

The question is what sort of spectrum would it be?

## SECTION 2 : READING

There are three **ATTITUDES** to Reading

### 1: CARELESS PLEASURE :

#### (READING *WITHOUT* RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS)

One chooses a book, on whatever subject, trashy or profound, and written in a trashy or profound style: and decides that one is NOT at all concerned about whether one understands it now or will remember any of it tomorrow. One will pick it up as and when one chooses, and one will read the chapters in any order one pleases, and in fact may not bother to finish it. One is certainly not going to make any written notes about it. One doesn't care what other people – parents, teachers or friends - think about this choice of book. One may not care what the author might think about what one thinks of the book. All that matters is that one gets some distraction, relief, pleasure, joy, during the minutes one is reading. Perhaps this is like the fun of flipping through a magazine.

### 2: CAREFUL PLEASURE :

#### (READING *WITH* RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS)

One chooses a book, again it might be on a trashy or profound subject, and it might be written in a trashy or profound style. This time though, one begins with the decision to accept a responsibility to others to read the book carefully. One might feel this responsibility to one or more of the following Others: the person who gave the book to one as a gift or a recommendation: one's parents and teachers and friends, even if they did not give or recommend this book; the Community of Readers, dead and living, who have spoken highly of this book: and the Author, whether living or dead. The sense of responsibility may feel very personal or slightly impersonal, but enough of a connection to another reader. One takes one's primary task to be to understand as clearly as one can the author's point of view and intention in writing the book: and the secondary task to be willing to tell one or more of the people to whom one feels responsible during the reading, what one's own point of view of the book is.

It is by definition not as careless a reading as the careless reading. It will require care and effort. But one must not make a terrible category mistake now. A *Careful Reading* does not mean by definition a *Painful Reading*. There are many pleasures in a careful reading.

- a) The Enjoyment of concentration.
- b) The Enjoyment of recognising difficulty.
- c) The Enjoyment of mastering difficulty.
- d) The Enjoyment of rereading.
- e) The Enjoyment of knowing one now knows the Author's point of view.
- f) The Enjoyment of thinking about this point of view.

- g) The Enjoyment of informed conversation with those Readers to whom one happily feels responsible.

3: Any variations between the two ends of the spectrum given by (1) and (2)

## **THE FOUR CONCEPTUAL-LEVELS OF READING**

### **LEVEL 1: FIRST READING**

Ideally, this is in *complete ignorance*. One knows nothing about the book: not about the content, style, purpose, or about the author. So this first-reading becomes a ‘direct conversation’ between you the reader and the author (dead or alive). Usually, one knows *a little* about the book – from others: parents, teachers, friends, tv, the papers, one’s knowledge of the author.

### **LEVEL 2: SECOND READING : THE COURTESY READING**

To read a book for the second time, whether one’s motive is a plain desire to repeat the pleasure of the first-reading, or to understand it, or to take notes on it, can be seen as mark of courtesy and respect to the Author (living or dead).

This next point is a logical one: it is *only* on a second reading that one can see *clearly* how the parts of the book fit as a whole, and the author’s skill in fitting.

### **LEVEL 3 : THE NOTES READING**

Ideally this should not be done on a first reading, but of course it can be.

There are FOUR stages. It is best to take one chapter/or twenty pages at a time.

#### **STAGE 1 : MARKING**

As you read tick/mark with a pencil

- a) Key points in the Author’s argument.
- b) Fascinating points: anything that interests, delights or enrages you.

#### **STAGE 2 : NOTE MAKING**

After you have ticked that chapter, go back to the beginning. Scan the marked passages, and make a written note in your notebook of Author’s key-points and of the fascinating points. Write in your own words: quote only when necessary.

#### **STAGE 3 : YOUR VERSION OF THE AUTHOR’S VIEW**

Summarise the Author’s key-points in your own words of one or two paragraphs per chapter. Then summarise all your paragraphs, of the whole book, on 1 PAGE.

#### **STAGE 4 : YOUR COMMENTARY**

Comment on your written paragraphs of the whole book (or of your summary).

Refer to the Author’s other books, and to other writers, as you see fit.

### **LEVEL 4: THE INFORMED/LEARNED READING**

After completing the four stages of the NOTES READING you will know the book very well. Now when you read it you will have a deeper appreciation of the author's skill in writing the book, and of the strengths and weaknesses of the Author's point of view.

**WARNING** : Unless you do a Notes Reading you never get past LEVEL 2: even if you physically, actually reread the book fifty times.

## SECTION 3 : THE IDENTITY SPECTRUM

Take any human activity and the name given to its practitioners: Footballer, Poet, Dancer, White-Witch, Athlete, Pilgrim, Intellectual, Snookerist, Biologist, Soldier, Mediator, Raconteur.... Let us say that the *Community of Practitioners* in each of these activities, have rules, impersonal criteria, on what one has to do, and for how long, before the community feels you are entitled to join their community and to share the identity of that name.

There are five basic ATTITUDES to any of these identities.

### 1: **INDIFFERENCE** (Not-Identity)

One has *no interest* in this activity, and *no desire* to be one of the community of those who do it.

### 2: **DILETTANTESQUE** (Identity-as-Dilettante)

One has a genuine *desire* to be part of the Community of doers. One might have various motives for this desire to belong. One may also have a genuine desire to do the activity. This would seem obvious: but given the complexity of human desire, and people's capacity to deceive themselves and others, this desire to do the activity might be weak or ambivalent. The consequence is that one might make very little *effort to learn* how to do it: but a great deal of *effort to look as if* one is learning or doing it. One might be successful at the pretence: for a while, but one will eventually be found out, and perhaps mocked and thrown out of the Community. An athlete-dilettante *rarely* trains and very rarely runs, but is *always* at the parties that the community of athletes put on for athletes.

### 3 : **DISPOSED** (Identity-by-Disposition)

One has a *genuine desire to do* the activity *and* be *part* of the Community of doers. One *intends* to learn how to do it. One *makes time* to learn and to practice. If one does this regularly, let us say once a week, then the Community will say that one can be described as *disposed towards that identity*, even before one is entitled to say one has achieved competency and skill at it. 'Amateur' means 'lover' not 'unprofessional loser'.

A Cocktail-Maker-by-disposition regularly makes time to practice and to learn more and to practice more. He studies the properties of varieties of alcohol and mixers and fruits, of suitable serving glasses: learns the history of cocktails, how to make some of the received menu of cocktails. This may involve trips to the library and abroad, and making notes etc.

It is not just hanging around bars now and then. Good bar-men and bar-women are in fact quite rare.

#### **4: ACHIEVED** (Identity-by-Achievement)

This is of course the *reference point* for the identity. It is only people *at this level* who get together and form a Community, and then state rules and criteria for the identity.

These rules are made by humans and are not God-given.

They might say a pianist-by-achievement is someone who has done at least the first eight grades. It is important to say that the actual certificate isn't the point: so a person who has never taken a grade, but could right now play as well as a person with the Grade 8 Certificate would be called a pianist-by-achievement. Anyone below that is either a pianist-by-disposition because they intend to get to Grade 8, and in fact practice regularly: or they are in fact a dilettante-pianist. They might add that dilettantes are just taking the piss and should be called "*mere ivory tinklers*".

#### **5: ENRAGED** (Identity-by-Hatred)

This is the most bizarre but necessary category. Such a person has *no desire* to do the activity or to be part of the Community of doers, but because of some personal *emotional disturbance*, or even *madness*, he/she defines his/her identity by hating the activity and its doers. One might know a person because of what they hate rather than by what they enjoy.

Some people expend far more energy on telling other people how much they hate football, footballers, tv-football, papers and books and photos of football..... than on doing something they desire and telling people about that.

Similarly, what and who are anti-semites, or anti-blacks in favour of enjoying?

#### **6: THE MOST COMMON IDENTITY : LAZY-LOSER**

Of course the most honourable identities are (3) and (4) Identity-by-disposition & Identity-by-Achievement. The most harmless is (1) Not-Identity: the person neither knows nor desires: but most importantly he/she is able to live by his/her identity and to let others live by theirs. The dilettante-Identity (2) may sometimes be harmless but it is always full of the risk, because of human envy, of developing some anger and hatred. The most dangerous and harmful is of course the pure-hater (5).

It is possible to get through life, without being able to do anything even a quarter-competently. One won't get the prizes or the community-belonging that comes to the tryers and achievers. Of course one might accept that one's laziness leads to one's identity as a loser. Losers may seem harmless, and comfortable with being part of the vast community of losers. This community might seem quite supportive to each other: but human frustration and human envy are boundless, and will for certain one day lead to uncontrollable rage.

**WARNING!** There is no short cut to a safe and joyous identity- whether as a pianist or a poet or a herbalist or a white-witch or cocktail-artiste or raconteur. One has to put in a lot of effort and regularly to rise out of the level of loser and hater.

## SECTION 4 : INTELLECTUAL & ANTI-INTELLECTUAL

Using the categories above, I will look at intellectuals. Here is my definition.

**INTELLECTUAL BY ACHIEVEMENT** *means someone who accepts:*

1: There *is* a permanent World Community of intellectuals, past and present: and, finally, in recent years, female as well as male, and non-Americo-European as well as Americo-European.

2: That gradually, over the centuries, these men and women, from one's own country and others, have formulated *impersonal criteria* for judging which books a mature, compassionate, and joyously-curious-about-the-world adult ought to know well. This doesn't just mean literature but all subjects – human writing about their world.

3: They must be *vigilant against bias* and chauvinism from gender, class, nation, creed.

4: That there is a basic line of effort required to *fulfil the ought*. Clive James comparing literary journalists with literature dons suggested:

***“Unless he [the journalist] can read books he should feel obliged to read, to advance his education, at a ratio of about to three to one with the books he is asked to review, he is unlikely to establish himself as anything more than an exalted hack.”*** [The Metropolitan Critic]

5: This obliged-reading involves the THIRD LEVEL OF READING – making written notes and written comments.

6: That the ideal condition for an intellectual-reader, of 15, 25 or 50, is to have a great Intellectual-by-Achievement offer to be one's lifelong mentor in reading.

It is charming to hear James say: ***“Four years after his death, my wife and her friends who studied with him still call themselves ‘continiani’ – in honour of Gianfranco Contini, the best educated man of recent times”*** [ibid]

### INTELLECTUAL BY DISPOSITION

I would suggest that the ordinary adult reader, who is not a journalist and don, fulfils ‘the ought’ by living and reading in the ratio: for every three books he/she reads because she simply *desires* to, he/she reads one they *ought* to. One makes time to read obliged-books that one does not enjoy, simply because they fit into the *development* of the obliged-books that one loves to reread.

### ANTI-INTELLECTUAL

This person believes that there are *no* books that one OUGHT to read. One reads *only* what one wants and gives one pleasure. The so-called Community of Intellectuals is a false construct, and often a tyranny – in the State, in school and even in the family. At her age, she doesn't want anyone telling her what to read when and how!

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## **SECTION 5 : THE TEN SPECTRA OF THE RELIGIOUS & SPIRITUAL LIFE**

1: The Stages of the Spiritual Quest

**AWAKENING : PURGATION : ENLIGHTENMENT : DARK-NIGHT-OF-THE-SOUL : UNION**

2: The Necessary Aspects of the Purgation

- a) **AVOID SINS - SINFUL THOUGHTS AND ACTS**
- b) **PURSUE VIRTUES - VIRTUOUS THOUGHTS AND ACTS**
- c) **CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP : CHURCH / SATSANG**
- d) **GOOD COMMUNITY WORKS / SERVICE/ SEVA**
- e) **PRIVATE PRAYER/ MEDITATION**

3 : The Only Types of Prayer/Meditation (spiritually lowest to highest)

**PETITION INTERCESSION ADORATION CONTEMPLATION**

4 : The Cardinal Sins (worst first)

**PRIDE ENVY WRATH SLOTH AVARICE GLUTTONY LUST  
SUPERBIA INVIDIA IRA ACEDIE AVARITIA GULA LUXURIA**

5: The Cardinal Virtues (Classical)

**PRUDENCE JUSTICE COURAGE MODERATION  
UNDERSTANDING KNOWLEDGE WISDOM**

6: The Divine Graces : Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Christian)

**FEAR-OF-GOD PIETY STRENGTH  
WISDOM UNDERSTANDING KNOWLEDGE COUSNEL**

7: The Christian Theological Virtues

**FAITH HOPE CHARITY (LOVE)**

8: The Christian Monastic Virtues

**POVERTY CHASTITY OBEDIENCE**

9: The Christian Creed Summary

**TEN COMMANDMENTS : LORDS PRAYER: GOLDEN RULE : BEATITUDES  
1 CORINTHIANS 13 : NICENE**

10: The Daily Lifelong Puzzle to Distinguish

## **THE GOOD : THE WISE : THE CLEVER : THE HOLY**

### **CHALLENGE**

**So, how many of these fifty or so words did you know & could define in context?**

I would guess most people don't know them, or even if they do, they can't define and place them on the right spectrum. Imagine the sins as colours or musical notes: then most people would be colour-blind and tone-deaf. They can't see how the various words connect and that they can only be understood in connection. If they are used in isolation there is a gross distortion of their meaning. Some people grow up thinking sexual sins are the utter worst: and that prayer is a regular mumble in church or before taking a penalty kick. This is not to deny that they feel comfortable or even that they live moral and kind lives. It is just that it is not worth talking to them about religion or religious concepts, because they will soon become muddled and then angry: because only bad emotions can support a bad argument. I am not interested in gossiping about their indiscretions or sins: but I do get so very, very, very weary of talking against ignorant chauvinism, woolly nonsense, and angry steam.

### **SECTION 6 : SOME OTHER SPECTRA**

There are many spectra one *ought to know clearly and live-by honestly* if one is ever to leave behind *pre-adult* ways of behaving, whether one is fifteen or forty-five. Most people stay stuck in pre-adult dispositions. To sketch but a few spectra.

**KINSHIP-FRIENDSHIP-TUTELAGE-CITIZENSHIP.**

**5-TYPES-OF-UNCOURTLINESS – COURAGE**

**PROCESS- RESULT**

**BLESSING – PERMISSION - NEGLECT – WITHHOLDING – CURSE**

**PRACTICE- JAMMING- PERFORMANCE- NEW DIMENSION PLAY**

**TIMEOFDAY – CHAT – GOSSIP – CONVERSATION – DISCUSSION-  
HEARTTOHEART – CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURE - CONFSSIONAL**

## AN APPENDIX : THE TRIANGLE OF COLOURISTS

I originally wrote this essay in December 1990, when I was 37. I had not started my counsellor training yet. The quote at the beginning of this essay intrigued me. I'd grown up with the pre-tv snooker-stars of the post-war era – Joe Davis, of whom my dad's pal was the spitting image. He couldn't play, and I was and am rubbish at cue. Hurricane Higgins was snooker's Georgie Best. Jimmy 'Lightening' White was said to be barely literate, but a prodigy of spatial awareness. By 14, still a schoolboy, he'd developed the knack of knocking balls in the air, and was playing and winning £5000 bets. Though he went on to win various championships & many more thousands, he never held the World Champion Trophy. Once he was winning 13-0 in a world final, but then still lost: on his birthday. It seems he was destined to be like the darts-man Cliff Lazarenko or Tennis Lendl, falling and failing just before the tape. When I read the quote in the Prologue, I thought, White is learning, still learning that there are many levels of practice: and that only very rarely can *necessary practice* be *knockabout fun*: but that difficult practice can be very fulfilling in a new grown-up way.

I was inspired to revise it because of the re-appearance of Jimmy and then Ronnie in the big-time news.

***“Since winning the United Kingdom Championship in 1992, White, now 41, has suffered one disappointment after another. He kept the faith, though, as did Tommy, his 84 year old father - one of the first to congratulate his son – and that perseverance in adversity has been vindicated.***

***‘My hero is Roberto Duran [the boxer] and I kept telling myself to punch like him’ White, whose career has been defined by exasperating failure on so many big occasions, said. ‘I always believed in myself and felt in my heart that I could lift another trophy. I can’t express how happy I am. I’m just delighted to get this out of my system. I’m going to Sheffield [the World Championship] a very happy man. You could say that I’m going to the Crucible in reasonable form ’”*** [The Times: 12 April 04]

A mere eight days later he would crash out of Sheffield saying:

***"I think I'm played out after winning the Players Championship. It was so close to this tournament that it took a lot out of me. Coming here I felt drained and I never got going at all."*** [The Guardian: 21 April 04]

It is important to note that his dad is older than King Lear – and to wonder what that means for fathers and sons.

Meanwhile, among the Champions, young Ronnie, was swaggering as pointlessly as the eternally adolescent *Wonderwall* Gallagher boys.

***"I'll keep swearing and gesturing at the pockets and there is nothing that snooker's governing body is going to do to stop me because that is me. If they want to fine me, that's all right. I've got plenty of money."***

[The Guardian : 24 April 04]

A few days after that I was astonished by a tv news item. It reported that Ronnie Rocket O'Sullivan, 29, had utterly trounced Stephen Dishwater-Dull Hendry, the greatest champion to date. But what astonished me was the brief glimpse of Ronnie, a few hours after that triumph, in the dingy practice room at 10pm with Ray Dracula Reardon. He was still practising, with Ray watching him. As expected he lifted the World Championship trophy.

***"A tearful O' Sullivan later dedicated the win, worth £250,000, to his father, who is serving a life sentence for murder at Long Lartin prison. 'People call me the Rocket, but I've slowed down and it has made me more consistent. But even more than winning this, I'm looking forward to working with Ray [Reardon]. He's added a new dimension to my game. He's fun and encourages me to play left-handed,' he added."***

[The Guardian : 4 May 04]

From a clinician's point of view, there is something tremendously interesting and powerful and in fact exemplary about this progress. A supremely gifted 29-year old, the son of a murderously violent father, behaving towards the Referee and Snooker Authorities like an uncontrollable 15-year-old. And then suddenly he accepts the concern, advice and tuition of a man old enough to be his granddad: and behaves with the decorum of a true professional and mature young man. Why he did this is impossible to know without a private interview with him. What is most impressive in the above speech is the re-ordering of the values of a fortnight earlier: then money was his joy, or at least his sword and shield: but now the thing he imagined as giving him most pleasure was new learning from and with an old master: the experience of human sharing.

**Everyone has some creative talent at something and thus the possibility of joy in learning and in practice and in performance, at some level. The lifelong puzzle, for every one of us, at 15, or 35, or 85, is how to establish a personal relationship with another person to give this daily effort a truly adult meaning and worth.**