

HOW TO
CULTIVATE
CONNECTION
AND
BELONGING

BY GAYANE KULIKYAN

A Guide to Creating Meaningful and Lasting Connections in Your Life
By Gayane Kulikyan

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With love and respect.

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Welcome

Welcome dear one,

I want you to know that I have struggled with feelings of disconnectedness and isolation since the age of nine, when I, along with my family and thousands of Armenians, had to flee my birthplace of Azerbaijan due to war. The world, as I knew it, was shattered. Suddenly, life became unpredictable and chaotic, with a continued string of changes.

I felt rootless and with every move we took to a new country, I secretly hoped that I would find my home, a place where I truly belonged and where I could settle. Even though I wanted to experience close ties, at one point my heart was so full of pain and grief, that I remember making a decision that I wasn't going to make any new friends. I was tired of getting to know people and then losing them when it was time to move again. My heart was closed and I became distant. Life felt flat and meaningless.

Although war and the experiences that followed brought destruction, loss and heartbreaks into my life, it also gave me an opportunity to deepen my understanding of life and people. It helped me to feel compassion, empathy and acceptance for our humanity, including our shadow side. It sparked a curiosity in me to intimately understand people and bring to light the invisible and unseen layers within us. Finally and most importantly, it expanded my capacity to love and to be loved.

I started to turn my life around when I took responsibility for what was happening in my life. I was pushed by my pain and pulled by my Soul towards something greater. I started to listen and trust my inner guidance.

I eventually graduated from a 2-year program with a Master's degree in Spiritual Psychology. I, then, got certified as a Transformational Coach and a Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness Practitioner.

I devoted hundreds of hours to learning from some of the best teachers in the world and I have applied their practices to my life to find a way through my dark nights of the soul.

As a result of the support I received, I experienced deep intimacy with myself, created meaningful connections, and deepened my relationships with friends and family. Most importantly, with every passing day, I feel more and more at home within myself and I am able to return to my center when Life presents me with difficulties.

What It's Like for You

I sense how tired you are of feeling like you don't belong and how much you are yearning to find a way out of this painful place. Being rootless can feel like you are **living on an island of your own**, separated from people and even yourself. The deeper truth that most people you know would never understand is that **you just don't feel at home in the world.**

You feel stuck and lost, unable to make decisions that will impact your life in the long run. You might feel invisible and misunderstood by your family and friends. The connections you have in life don't seem to touch the depths of who you are or even if closeness has been experienced, with time the relations just fizzle out.

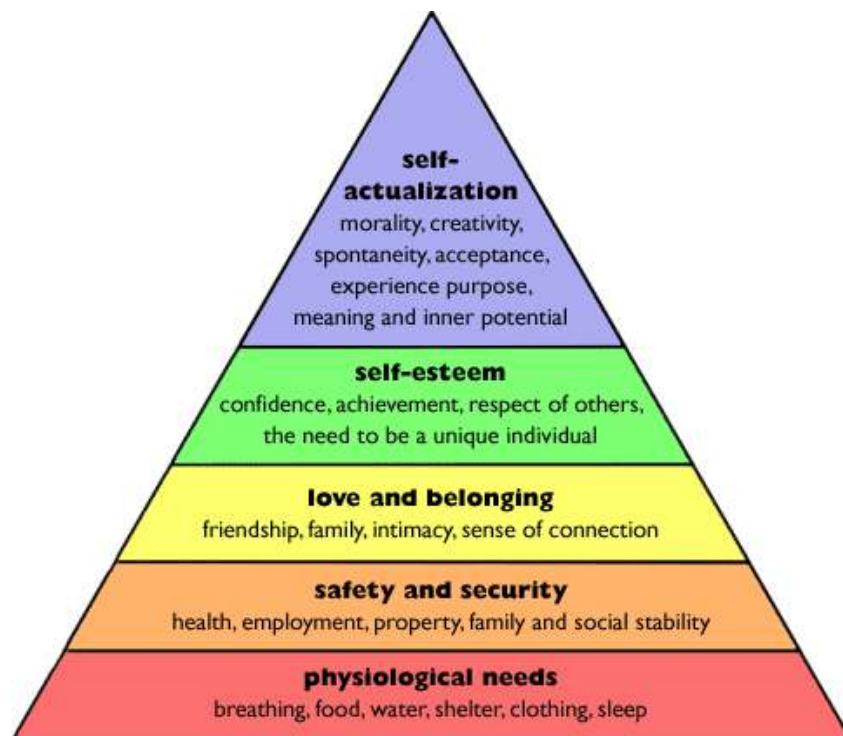
You might find it challenging to be vulnerable with others, to open up to new friendships and relationships for fear of losing them. At the same time, you might feel a longing, something tugging at your heart, asking for a change or a different way.

I want you to know that it's normal for you to long for connection and belonging and, remember, it is possible for you to experience what you truly desire. In the following pages I will speak to the challenges you are most likely experiencing in your life and I'll explain to you how you can move through them with gentleness and compassion.

There is no need for you to rush through these pages. Please take your time. It took me several years to get to where I am and I am still learning and healing. The goal is to not "resolve" all your issues in one sitting but to rather learn to become intimate with the difficulties, to have plenty of patience with yourself and as hard as it might be to hear, to enjoy the journey.

To give you a brief history and the importance of what you are seeking, in 1943 Abraham Maslow created a concept that human needs can be placed in a hierarchy. He stated that **belonging and love are essential needs** in human development, along with self-esteem, self-actualization, physiological and safety needs.

In 2011, Maslow’s theory has been tested by contemporary researchers Tay & Diener. They analyzed the data of 60,865 participants from 123 countries, representing every major region of the world. The results of the study confirmed the view that **universal human needs exist regardless of cultural differences**. Researchers made a discovery that the needs don’t necessarily fall into a particular hierarchy and they can coexist simultaneously. For a list of human needs and feelings, please reference Appendix section.



The need to belong is a natural part of being human and it’s one of your birthrights. However, along your path various “negative” experiences blocked your way to connection and relatedness. Your need for belonging CAN be fulfilled once the blocks have been identified, healed and cleared.

What Prevents You from Feeling Like You Belong