

## Falling in love, staying in love

For any relationship, especially marriage, partnership and friendship, to work we need two basic ingredients: lovingkindness and compassion. Relationship means, or should mean, the willingness to see something likeable and workable in one another despite the differences and difficulties.

This is not always easy because we are *individuals*, meaning that we have our own ideas about life and things. Since an individual is someone who, as a rule, thinks for himself or herself, there will often be differences in opinions. We often have differing likes and dislikes. This is what makes us human.

A successful relationship then begins with our willingness and ability to set aside, at least temporarily, our likes and dislikes, and to try to think and feel like the other person. When this acceptance goes both ways, then we have a working, even wholesome, relationship.

When we understand and accept this human divergence – that we are individuals with our own thinking and feelings – then our marriage, partnership or friendship is very likely to work. A stronger person may want to have his way: this is the “power” mode. Sometimes this may work, especially when this is beneficial for both sides. But the “love” mode works better when it involves both parties: two hearts are better than one.

A truly stronger person is one who understands why he or she has to accept a spouse, partner or friend as he or she really is. In fact, all happy relationships begin in this way. We “fall in love” with what we see desirable in another. The task now is to “stay in love,” that is, to keep gazing on the good qualities of the other person despite everything else.

Relationships fail when there is too much measuring against one another. Love is a feeling, and therefore cannot be measured. It is not helpful to say, for example, who loves whom *more*. At best, we can only say how much or how well we *outwardly* show our love for one another.

For, love is not love till we show it. Since the other person is not a mind-reader (a helpful assumption), we need at least occasionally, and as spontaneously as possible, to express an appreciation of the other person. A bell is not a bell till we ring it.

Love can be learned, and needs to be learned. In fact, courtship is a vital process of learning how to love. Even if a courtship fails, no one has failed: it simply means that there are not enough connecting tissues of common emotions to hold the two people together.

Break-ups are generally less painful for a courting couple than for a married couple. In fact, the first courtships may not always be successful. Yet we learn more from failure than we do from success. More realistically, we can say that we have not failed: we have not yet found the right partner.

We need to examine what went wrong and what we can do about it in a wholesome way. Since we are all evolving beings, love is itself a learning process, especially after marriage. For, if we see marriage as a life-long continuing education in loving, we are likely to be good students.

Another vital concept to the understanding of a working relationship is that of *conditionality*. We are defined and propelled by two kinds of conditions: internal and external. Internal conditions are how we think and feel. External conditions are the personality (thinking and feelings) of the other person, as well as various social conditions (family, society, work, finance, etc).

In other words, there is no *one*, no *one* cause, to be blamed when a relationship fails. It is the result of many conditions. As such, it is wise to watch out for such conditions and prevent them from affecting our relationship. Or when such conditions do arise and momentarily trouble our relationship, we need to reflect what we can learn from them, and how we can together work around them.

A relationship is more likely to work when both sides, or even one side, were to see the advantages of working *together*. In other words, we are able to see a bigger picture: that we are more than mere bodies. There must also be a touching of hearts and overlapping of vision.

Imagine: what can two loving hearts do together that can also benefit others. Such a shared higher goal might begin with something as basic as supporting one another, or raising children, but it can become more inclusive, more deepening in spirit. Indeed, the more our mutual love can accept others, especially the less fortunate, the more meaningful we will see our relationship, as it is valuable to others, too.

A relationship may be a life-time enterprise, but a life-time is a blink in cosmic time. We are like the little black and white points of light of these words we are now reading. This contrast becomes letters and words, little cells of sounds and meanings that embrace one another to form a bigger picture that benefits the reader.

Our relationship is, above all, a learning process. Far from being a single human process, it is only a beginning of an interbeing, a common and connected life-quest. How well we can get along with others reflects how well we can get along with ourselves. How well we understand ourselves is reflected in how well we love and treat others. Our love defines how those around us evolve with us.

To love is to accept others as they are; at least to begin there. Just as we would like others to accept us just as we are, we need to accept others as they are, too. In fact, it is easier if we initiate this process: this is how we make friends. That is why we look in the eye of those we love or accept. We need to “see” others as they are: we need to look deep into them and see them as we see ourselves.

It strengthens us in a powerful way if we are willing and able to see that what we do not like in others is only a reflection of something about ourselves that we do not like. We must spend some time reflecting on this point since we need to truly feel beyond the words. A hint here is *compassion*, that is, kindness shown even to those who do not deserve it.

We might think that we hate “someone,” but hating is merely *a* condition of our life: it is within us, a matter of the heart. If it is “someone” that we hate, that hate would disappear as soon that “someone” is gone. If we carry this hate around inside us, surely it is a part of us. We do not deserve this hate. Show it compassion: let it go.