

Nearly everyone I know wants to be in a loving intimate interpersonal relationship. Yet paradoxically as a society we struggle with maintaining a long term interpersonal relationship. Consider that nearly half of all marriages end in divorce. Then consider that when we measure the 50% which remain together only 10% of those are truly happy. It is not a pretty picture.

There are many reasons for this state of affairs. For example, we have poor role models to go by. The media's portrayal of relationships is appalling at best. They often bear little resemblance to how a real life relationship works. On top of that they almost always contend that the problem is not enough love and that true love will always win. It is a myth, one of the grand illusions of our society.

Our families often have problems of their own. They frequently do not know much better than what we do, yet we look to them for advice. They have been affected by wars, poverty, and a host of experiences which have taught them to close themselves off. Drinking, gambling and all sorts of addictions are becoming common place. Violence in a myriad of form plagues us. We have generation after generation of people affected by trauma and we call that normal... Is it any wonder that so many people struggle in interpersonal relationships?

Which is not to say that there are not exceptions to the above, because there are. But generally speaking what we are taught about relationships is filled with inaccuracies, myth making and storytelling with no basis in reality.

As stated previously there are many reasons why relationships fall apart. But one of the more compelling reasons which affect relationships and their ultimate success is how we go about selecting a partner. Often it is on the basis of falling in love, where chemicals are running rampant in our brain and where we try to live up to the distorted picture that goes on in our head. But if we were to ask that 10% of people who are happy, very few of them would respond with the answer of longevity was romantic love. What they invariably would say is that the love they felt for each other changed along the way. The love not only changes but deepens. This love encompasses friendship and nurturance of each other's capabilities. There is a mutual respect for each other that is closer in nature to a deep enduring valued friendship than the intensity of the romantic period. They are still attracted to each other and lovemaking has not diminished in quality - it is not a platonic relationship in any sense of the word.

The same phenomena seems to occur in successful arranged marriages. The difference there is they are not initially in-love as such. Love does blossom though in these

relationships over time and deepens and once again encompasses friendship. Here in the west we look down on arranged marriages, but the reality is that in terms of long term happiness that arranged model of marriage is far more successful than our western version. We might say they are forced to get happy, but there is more to it than that which might make for an interesting discussion at some future point.

When I counsel people on relationships I have two broad aims. The first of these is to clear unconscious blockages and to make sure that unconscious processes are in alignment with the conscious intentions. The golden rule is if the unconscious wants to go one way and the conscious process wants to go another it is the unconscious process which will prevail. It is by far the more powerful process, much more powerful than our conscious thoughts and intentions. It is vitally important to make the unconscious your friend! In upcoming articles I will speak more of the role of unconscious process and selection but for now let's look at the other broad aim which is more in keeping with what occurs consciously in successful relationships.

The other aim is to help a person be a little more conscious in the relationship and in particular to be more consciously in synch with what really works in a relationship. While the unconscious mind is the more powerful process, the conscious mind works a bit like a light in a lighthouse. It has the ability to highlight where we would like to go. If the unconscious is in synch that's exactly where you will go. That is the law!

In this regard I will point to a few things that should be non-negotiable for people entering relationships and are in relationships.

We often look for status, income, beauty among many other variables in a partner. But I find most people do not look at potential partners in the following terms so here goes:

1. **Is the person kind?** This should be fundamental to all relationships. If I am going to spend 20+ years with someone, I want to be treated with kindness. Similarly, if I truly love someone I want to be kind to them. Kindness is important, it allows us to genuinely like the other person, and it has a way of bringing people together. Has someone ever done something kind for you? Were you not touched by their kindness? Why would you not want this precious commodity in a relationship?
2. **Is the person generous?** Do not confuse generosity with extravagance. Generosity in this context is about how much time and energy a person gives to another and less about money spent on each, though that too is a part of it. It does not always have to be about money, but occasionally doing something special for a loved one in a generous way really brings harmony and appreciation to a relationship. Do you really

want to be married to someone who is stingy with emotions, gifts, communication, for the remainder of your life?

3. **Is the person emotionally stable?** Emotional stability in a relationship is the hallmark of a great relationship. Do not confuse remoteness or withholding as measure of emotional stability. Emotions will rise and fall in a relationship as they tend to do. But if a person is being frequently overwhelmed by emotions on a long term basis then it consumes a lot of energy and the relationship quickly flounders.
4. **Is the person on your side and do they bring the best out in you?** The person whom you will spend the rest of your life with, should have a capacity to bring the best of you out into the open. They should help to make sure that you put your best foot forward as often as possible, not only in the relationship but in all areas of life. I am not speaking of perfection or getting on each other's back. What I mean is that the other person has your best interests at heart and helps you to find ways to garner those interests in ways that are beneficial to all concerned. The overall feel of your partner is that they should make you look forward to the day ahead in a consistent manner.
5. **Is the person low maintenance?** All relationships require a degree of work, but by and large the relationship should be easy going and facilitate ways for both people to be relaxed around each other. It should be relatively drama free much like a relationship with a great friend that just goes along but each values the other greatly. When an issue does crop up it is dealt with in an adult fashion. Overworking a relationship is a great way to ensure stress surfaces and that the relationship feels like a pressure cooker. Underworking a relationship makes sure the relationship never grows and stagnates. Low maintenance does not mean no maintenance! An aim of a relationship should be to find a balance where each partner feels comfortable and relaxed around the other. The quality of the space should be closer to play than to work.

We should bear in mind that the person whom we may want to spend the rest of our lives with should ultimately be a fantastic friend. The friend part should be in consciousness as it's vitally important. Of course we need to find the person attractive, but attraction does not negate friendship. Friendship and attraction are indeed compatible, but rarely are they couched in those terms.

Then all the other things come into play like common interests - we might want someone smart or physically active, or hard working etc. These play a role too. But without, kindness, generosity, emotional stability, the capacity to bring out the best in us, and the ability to be relatively low maintenance then we are not helping our cause in being in a long term relationship.

I think I will call the follow up article to this Unconsciously Selecting a Life Partner.