

Preparing for a Relationship

A RELATIONSHIP IS A PATH

In many respects, a relationship is a “path” or “yoga”, a path of *self-knowledge*. It is a *practice*, similar to other paths of self-knowledge such as meditation, prayer or martial arts. Like meditation, prayer, or martial arts, the final destination of the path of relationship is a place within us. The final destination is who we become by traveling this path. When well-traveled, these paths, these yogas, take us home to ourselves; they lead to our healing. *We* are the destination of our path. If our relationships constitute such a path, then it does not matter how many partners we have had or how long those relationships have lasted. At the end of the day, and at the end of our lives, the only thing that matters is the integrity, self-honesty, and discipline that we have brought to this practice, to our path. It is easy to feel like a “failure” because we haven’t found our “soul mate” or “life partner”. Are our past relationships failures? Perhaps they are, but not because we are no longer in them. They are only “failures” to the degree that we did not learn the lessons they offered us... to the degree that we did not look in the mirror and walk down our path with integrity.

A RELATIONSHIP IS A GARDEN PATH

A relationship is a system that two people create together. If one person changes the way they relate to that system, then the whole system changes. It takes two people to create a relationship, but only one to end it. Put another way, a relationship is a garden that needs two gardeners. With only one gardener it will die. We must pick the right gardener with whom to share our garden. Both gardeners must weed the garden on a regular basis, or it will be overrun. A relationship is not a static, closed, system; it is a living, dynamic one. Like any garden, it needs proper amounts of sunlight, nutrients, water, soil, and love. Things must be planted at the right time, in the right way, and in the right soil. When all these pieces are in place we may create abundance. The more we put into such a garden, the greater joy and benefit we can harvest from it, and the more nourishment we will have in our lives.

Whatever garden we choose to create with our partner is the environment in which we must live. There is no escape from this. It is so obvious that we often fail to see it, particularly when we ourselves have been wounded. Any wounding that we do to our partner in reaction to our pain will resonate throughout the relationship. Eventually, there are always consequences. Blame is salt in the soil of our garden. Contempt is scorched earth. We cannot defecate in our nest and expect our lives to smell like roses. Being kind to our partner while maintaining our integrity can be one of the best long-term investments we can make in our lives. Our partner will trigger our shadow, the part of ourselves that we don't want to face. This is guaranteed. We can deal with it now or we can deal with it later, but we cannot escape the terrain that we co-create in our relationship.

A RELATIONSHIP IS A CONTAINER

In Asia, when they want to wash potatoes, they take a bucket and fill it first with potatoes and then with water. They then take a stick,

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put it in the center of the bucket, and pull it up and down. The stick moves the potatoes and all the potatoes end up rolling and rubbing against each other. The result is that they polish each other as they become clean.

In relationship, we become like the potatoes in that bucket. We create friction with our partner and, if we are willing to be polished, that friction polishes our character.

A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP IS A SACRED CONTAINER

A committed relationship is sacred container. That sacred container has two kinds of material in it, gold and shit. When there is enough gold in the container we will put up with all kinds of shit. But if enough gold is taken out of the container, then what we are left with is just shit. The ratio of gold-to-shit is different for each man, and when the gold-to-shit ratio becomes intolerable, we leave the relationship.

If we look deeper into the shit, so to speak, we may notice that what we thought was shit may not be shit at all. On closer examination what we thought of as shit might actually turn out to be painful-gold. Painful-gold is shit that has the *opportunity* to become pleasurable-gold, but not necessarily in the moment. In the moment it is just painful. Just as the shit we use in our garden can yield flowers, so can the shit in our relationship. Ultimately what we have with our partner is a ratio of pleasurable-gold to painful-gold.

Just as in our garden, we need the right amount of shit (painful-gold) to make the garden flourish. In correct amounts the shit is composted and transmuted. But if there is too much shit in our garden we will burn the soil and destroy our creation. Ironically the shit that has destroyed one garden is sometimes the most valuable gold of all for the next garden.

Now, if we have had many years of a pleasurable-gold stored up with our partner, we may have the ability to transmute a lot of painful-gold before it burns our garden. We may be able to use the

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alchemical furnace of our relationship and our history to transform it into pleasurable-gold, to turn it into flowers. But if we do not have enough pleasurable-gold stored up we will not be able to suffer through the process, nor should we. Life gives us plenty of shit to deal with and opportunities for growth without us needing to be masochistic. We carry the seeds of our own healing within us wherever we go. They are not necessarily contained in one partner. The ultimate purpose of our relationship may be more for our healing than our happiness.

COMMITMENT

The sacred container of our relationship has limits; those limitations are what make it a container. The limitations of relationship are its greatest safety, its greatest asset, and its greatest danger. Until we deeply root in ourselves we may see the limitations in relationship as a trap. This is the cliché of marriage in our society: We believe that when we commit we limit ourselves, that we are “trapped”. If we are not ready for genuine commitment then a relationship can indeed be a trap. Ultimately, the degree to which we can commit to our relationship is the degree to which we can commit to our own lives... but only if we are ready to be annealed. In that annealing, our relationship becomes a temple of mirrors that allow us the possibility to reclaim our disowned selves.

Commitment is tenacity; it is the mortar that holds our values in place. Without commitment nothing happens. True commitment is like soil in our garden; without it nothing can grow. A healthy masculinity is *defined* by commitment; without it we are incapable of embracing our masculine nature. Committing is not about gritting our teeth and suffering; it is about recognizing who we *are* and what is important to us. Commitment must arise from the inside; it cannot be worn like a piece of clothing. It cannot emerge from outside us, from shame or guilt. We see who we *are* not who we *wish* we were, and our commitment arises out of that core. When we