

Open-hearted relationships: a sustainable approach.

There's a problem isn't there with being a bit of a "greenie" and wanting to cultivate the love of one's life? No, take that back – there are several problems!

For a start, those of us who value people and planet above profit still, woefully, seem to be in the minority. We have begun viewing relationships as arrangements that are based no longer on materialistic values such as social status, money-earning potential, or political gain but rather on sustainable values such as mutual interest, understanding and love.

Secondly, most of us are not truly honest with ourselves about who we really are and what we expect from a relationship.

And thirdly, once we have discovered who we really are and what we expect from relationships, we forget to apply those things in the turmoil of everyday situations.

If you are single and dating or thinking of doing so, what's the best way to approach it if you're looking for a long-term, committed, fulfilling, relationship?

If you are currently in a relationship, how do you review your situation and inject a new lease of life into your connection with your beloved?

Let's assume that the first step one needs to take before beginning any new journey is to know where you're starting from. In relationship terms, this means fully accepting who you are and what your life situation is **now**. Be honest with yourself and, without wishing it were any different, just spend some time taking stock.

Knowing what you know about yourself, what are your answers to the following questions?:

Are you really ready for a new relationship?

Do you have the time and the energy to commit to it?

Do your work and family circumstances allow for it?

How emotionally prepared are you for a new relationship?

Have you come to terms with painful experiences from the past?

Are you really ready to be emotionally and physically intimate with someone else and accept the risks that that involves, or are you still feeling hurt due to resentment, anger or bitterness from previous experiences?

What is open-heartedness?

If we think of our hearts as the seat of our love, for ourselves, our planet, other people, then we can maybe imagine a hard protective shell that encases it. Metaphorically speaking, we all have this. It's the result of years of conditioning from our childhood and from previous relationship experiences. It is a form of identity that we have constructed for ourselves as a secure way of operating in the

world. In order to relate successfully with another in a romantic capacity, though, we will need to allow this shell to crack open to reveal who we really are. We will also need to allow the space for our romantic partner to do the same, to cultivate a state of presence that is grounded in the heart. This involves accepting our partner for who they are, their “being,” rather than viewing them as a means to fill a gap in our lives. That’s what I mean by being open-hearted. It’s about being authentic, complete in ourselves, genuine, sincere, honest and giving.

Approaching relationships with an open-heart has some wonderful advantages. When you know you’re being open-hearted, you allow the possibility of being accepted for who you are, not who you would like others to believe you might be. This is far easier and less stressful than keeping up appearances! It gives you some simple principles to guide you in communicating with others, whether in writing, by phone or in person. You can ask yourself: “What is the most open-hearted way for me to respond in this situation?” “How do I let this person know that I’d really like to spend more time with them, whilst accepting the risk of rejection?” “What am I expecting from/assuming about this person that’s preventing us connecting in a meaningful way?”

An open heart is:

Courageous - It accepts the risk of failure knowing that each mistake made is a learning opportunity.

Compassionate - It considers the other person’s needs and points of view.

Linked to the mind - through self-awareness and the ability to feel and express emotions. It knows what it feels and is able to communicate this.

Sustainable relationships are formed and maintained by supporting and encouraging each other’s personal growth through openness, honesty, love and compassion. I would suggest that this is our greatest hope for forming long-term, committed and fulfilling relationships. Let’s take time each day to remind ourselves of this and to approach each of our relationships with an open-heart.

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