



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

Expectations In A Relationship

I have often noticed in relationships, that many people foster all sorts of expectations and demands according to their own rules, believing that their partner should behave exactly the way they think is right. Any other behaviour than the one sanctioned, no matter how helpful and thoughtful, goes unappreciated, or, is sometimes even unnoticed. This can lead to severe problems and misunderstandings within a relationship.

I know a young man, for example, who is also my student. One day he gave me a bell, a vajra and a book cover for his girlfriend, whom I was to meet on one of my travels. I delivered everything dutifully. A few months later, I met him again and he said: “Rinpoche, I got into so much trouble! My girlfriend said that those were the wrong kinds of presents for someone you love - I should have bought her flowers or something like that. She didn’t even say ‘thank you’!”

I really felt for him. From his perspective, he had bought her the nicest things he could think of. I had helped him shop and had given him advice regarding the quality of these items. He really wanted to make her happy, but she had another concept of a lover’s gift and therefore wasn’t able to appreciate his present at all. She simply couldn’t see how well he had meant. With a little understanding, it could have been a great gift for them both, but in their situation, it turned into a big disappointment instead.

The most important point here is to recognise the motivation of our partner. What are they doing and why? Through this inquiry we might get a better understanding of their actions, start to appreciate their qualities, and can therefore develop compassion for them. This is the first point I wanted to mention.

The second point is, that we often tend to think only about what we are bringing to the relationship; what we are doing for the other, how supportive we are. If we think along the lines: “I am doing this for him; I sacrificed that for him. I helped him in this situation”, then automatically the thoughts follow: “But he didn’t do that for me. He didn’t support me there. He didn’t help me in this situation.” It would be much more helpful to remember what our partner does for us in course of our relationship, how he or she supported us within their means without constantly weighing who is doing what against one another.

There are many relationships, for example, where one person stays at home and the other goes to work. When they meet up at home in the evening, they could start a fight, one arguing: “I am always at home cooking your dinner, cleaning up after you and washing your clothes!” Then the other answering: “In order to pay for your food, I need to go out every day and work for eight hours!” Both of them are doing an important job, but each one of them only sees their own contribution and doesn’t appreciate the efforts of the other one. That is actually very sad and can endanger the relationship.

So please be mindful of your partner and try to see them for who they really are, and the positive things they bring to you.

Wasmuthausen, November 2013

Translated from Tibetan by Daniela Hartmann

Edited by Jacqueline Bourbon