THREE STAGES OF RELATIONSHIP

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David Deida’s powerful writing on loving, sex, and spirituality expresses three stages of loving: dependence, independence, and true devotion. In a sense, these stages mirror the fusion of infancy, the control of adolescence, and the surrender of healthy adulthood.

In the first stage, there is an attempt at completion through someone or something outside of the self, and boundaries between inside and outside are blurred. In the second stage, there is a thrust toward a definition of the self, and the desire for more personal power. A new sense of boundaries, at first a bit brittle, begins to form. In the third stage, once the sense of self has been sufficiently formed, the momentum is toward surrender of the limitations of separation, and toward a merger with the formless, together with another. The emptiness of self becomes the place from which the relationship grows.

In the first stage, the primitive dependency needs are primary, and the energetics involve grasping and clinging, or their shadow, rejecting and avoiding. It is really about what each can get from the other, and the energy of lust and hunger for fulfillment is basic and demands payment. No matter how much a person has grown in other relationships, a new beginning with a partner will expose some of
these earlier emotions. There is no judgment here, and there is nothing wrong with the lustful hunger of the hormone driven birth of a new relationship. The reality is that it does not last, and the natural movement toward growth arises as the inevitable conflict emerges. Someone is not getting his/her needs met, and the push-pull dance begins. The relationship will either end at this point, the couple will become stuck in symbiosis, or growth into the second stage will begin to unfold.

In the second stage of loving, the process of differentiation leads to an increased capacity for self-soothing, and a greater acceptance that the partner will not fulfill the bottomless infantile needs that are evoked in an intimate relationship. There is a thrust toward more independence on many levels: emotional, social, at times financial, and inevitably, the level of sexuality. But there are potential pitfalls with this 50/50 relationship. The aliveness and sexual passion begins to fade, and a sense of something missing arises at our center. As Deida says, “The side-effect of this effort toward a 50/50 relationship is the suppression or starvation of our naturally more Masculine, or Feminine sexual essence.”

Many relationships end here, as the need for independence in one or the other is interpreted as the need to be alone. The wanting and wanting to be wanted of the first stage are neutralized into an equitable partnership which leaves an emptiness at the core. Often
one of the other seeks the passion elsewhere, which can easily send them back into the grasping fires of the first stage. If they find their way to counseling, couples’ therapists often hear the following as a forlorn couple sits in their office: “We love each other, but we are not in love with each other.”

If the relationship survives, most do not naturally grow to the stage beyond, since few people are even aware that there is more than the civilized cohabitation of two separate adults, who, if they are lucky, have sex enough to keep each other some version of satisfied. As David Deida says, “Until you breathe divine love throughout your body and surrender as the force of love itself, it seems you only have two options: dependence and independence.” And, no matter how good it gets in stage two, if one or the other partner continues to grow, the hunger for more will arise once again, and the familiar voice will be heard, dimly at first, “There must be more than this.” And there is.

Deida’s description of this third possibility is “utter devotional openness.” This devotional openness is to life and love itself, in all its various forms, whether to a partner, children, community, or any passion which lifts a person beyond the illusion of a separate self into the bliss of union. In essence, this is a kind of loving in which you first take a vow to your highest self or soul, as some would describe it. The true commitment is to your own purpose in life (masculine energy)
which paves the way to a fullness (feminine energy) of relationship with another. There is as Carl Jung said, an inner marriage bringing forth wholeness.

In our fact-paced post-modern world of texting and sexting, few people are willing to open to this depth of conscious love fullness, as a way of living every day. If it is even known as a possibility, there are countless excuses having to do with time, energy, and every possible distraction that arises, so that bliss is put on the backburner, if longed for at all. And there are those readily available addictions that can fill in the hole temporarily, one of them being the tendency to place blame on the other person for our own unhappiness or lack of fulfillment.

In truth, a great fear arises as we step beyond the “safety” of the second stage of 50/50 relating, and find within ourselves the courage to trust so much that we are willing to become absolutely vulnerable. And 100% vulnerability is the only way to give and receive the fullness of who we are.

The reality is that this third way of being in relationship is available all the time, in the midst of life’s chaos. As Deida says, “Eventually, you can learn to open as deep love fullness, giving and receiving divine love through every breath, through every gesture of your body, in every relationship, including with your family and friends.
Your yearning can bloom from dependence to independence into the fullness of utter devotional openness." This kind of loving grows an ever-widening circle of embrace. Two people who are consciously cultivating this love-fullness, will bring to their own intimate partnership an infinite source of passion and deepening. And conflict will be welcomed as connection trying to happen, rather than something to avoid or control.

When an intimate relationship comes to an end, especially if there is unresolved conflict in the process, it is a profound opportunity for a person to return to the Self and spend time collecting the parts of Self which have been scattered or given away, and to reflect on the part we have played in the relationship. This process is essential in order to heal and carry the light of consciousness into future connections.

It is a time to practice utter devotional surrender in as many areas of your life as possible, as a single person, making the whole world your lover. This includes being your own Beloved, attending to your own emotional, physical (including sexual) and spiritual life. In this way we cultivate our capacity to contain the powerful energies of the third stage of loving, to live in life as bliss. We are thus more likely to attract others who can meet us in this sacred space. This becomes our offering to all that is.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

3. Ibid, p. 226
4. Ibid, p. 227