Marriage and Partnership – Love is not a contract

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Before we dive in: I'll be introducing a new model, which I call deepfriendship. It is simple but not easy to grok[1] when coming from conventional thinking. It is based on honesty, respect, freewill, following your heart and balance – balancing in yourself all the pulls and pushes and then flowing with what feels right. You could say it's a way of being in a deep relationship *and* in the moment. For me it's simply the *right* way, and I can nowadays no longer imagine wanting things any other way.

Conventional monogamous partnerships

There are a number of religions and subdivisions of religions with more or less standard wedding vows. Nowadays there are also interfaith and non-denominational options, and also the option to create your own wedding vows. The latter, more modern options I view as a limited improvement – limited because they still all (a) make promises which often will be broken, and (b) more or less all set the expectation of being faithful until the death of one partner.

Protestant

In the name of God, I, _____, take you, _____, to be my (husband/wife), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

Lutheran

I, _____ , take you, to be my (wife/husband), and these things I promise you: I will be faithful to you and honest with you; I will respect, trust, help, and care for you; I will share my life with you; I will forgive you as we have been forgiven; and I will try with you better to understand ourselves, the world, and God; through the best and worst of what is to come, and as long as we live.

Cherokee

God in heaven above please protect the ones we love. We honour all you created as we pledge our hearts and lives together. We honour Mother Earth and ask for our marriage to be abundant and grow stronger through the seasons. We honour fire and ask that

1 The word grok was created by Robert A. Heinlein is his 1961 novel 'Stranger in a strange world'. Background-Info in Wikipedia. The dictionary meaning "to understand intuitively or by empathy, to establish rapport with" is less than the meaning implied in the novel: The observer becomes a part of the observed – to merge, blend, intermarry, lose identity in group experience. All that groks is God.

our union be warm and glowing with love in our hearts. We honour wind and ask that we sail through life safe and calm as in our fathers' arms. We honour water to clean and soothe our relationship — that it may never thirst for love. With all the forces of the universe you created, we pray for harmony as we grow forever young together. Amen.

Some Comments

The vows of the major religions of course put the marriage into the context of their particular version of God – implying the dos and don'ts dogmas of that religion into the marriage. The whole idea of God stems from a younger humanity with a very limited understanding of the world as compared to nowadays and is obsolete. As usual, Buddhism is far ahead of the pack – I suggest you look for Buddhist wedding vows on the internet, they are spiritually based and I find them remarkably realistic. Even so, pledges are made which will quite likely be broken.

What I find particularly distressing is the Protestant "to have and to hold". I have a new car, and oh, by the way, I also have a new wife. Oops. Regarding "to hold" it's not apparent from the words themselves if to support or to hold onto is meant.

The bottom line here is: Personal and religious expectations bundled into lifetime vows.

Mature people for mature relationships

In my younger years – until I became, more or less, the person I am now – I could never have imagined the type of relationship I'm about to describe here.

For my part, I nowadays don't need anyone to give me value in life by their loving me, or being my partner, bed-mate or such. This is because internally I don't pose the question of my self-worth. Instead, I'm always aware of the connectedness of all things, in which all are by nature equally valid, equally unique, equally worthy of being valued. So nothing a deepfriend might do, however unexpected, could eclipse my well-wishing for that person – but it may reduce resonance and have the knock-on effect of that person becoming a 'normal' friend, or even someone I knew intimately for a time.

That said, assuming a deepfriendship is mutual – both friends embodying all the qualities listed below – then I can hardly imagine the friendship going out like a candle. Circumstances may dictate a geographical separation, but the hearts… they never forget how amazingly sweet (and to date seldom) such a friendship is. Love abides.

The deepfriendship model

I don't ascribe to any conventional dogma on partnership. Yet I may well be in a relationship which, at first glance, could look like one, so let's look at what characterises a 'deepfriendship' type of relationship. But before we do so, it may be helpful to recap:

> We are all in relationship with all beings.

The above statement is a simple fact, the result of the mechanism behind Perception Throughout Space and Time. And of course we don't all continually consciously notice every other living being in the universe, only those where we have a perception key, be it just for a moment or over many years. Resonance automatically shapes our lives, as we automatically meet people more where resonance is more, and have little motivation to meet people where there is little resonance. Resonance can happen in a multitude of fields of life – art, music, gardening, personality structure, political or charitable activity, intimacy and sex, personal energy structures – the list could go on and on[2]. These are the qualities which for me characterise a deepfriendship:

- The habit of earnest reflection on experiences leads to mental and emotional maturity
  As I've stated time and again: experience and reflect, experience and reflect. So someone has reflected on their experiences with themselves and others and swapped a lot of ego for a tub full of empathy, and moved from naivety to discernment. The reflection has been about themselves, about others, and (hopefully) about the nature of existence. I find such people attractive, and easy to be with.
- Complete honesty
  And not just not lying, but also not withholding or 'colouring' any important information. Note that this honesty need not and should not be in any way brutal – rather, in delicate matters it should be implemented tactfully, e.g. at the right moment, and in a spirit of well-wishing and respect.
- No promises
  The late Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh once said that he hardly ever made promises, because he could not know what the next day might bring. I heard that remark at least 30 years ago, and never forgot it. It has shaped me – because he was right. To make a promise you must take the inherent uncertainty from life, and limit its flexibility and flow. The first you can't do, the second I recommend you to shy away from. A plastic rose may look good but has no fragrance and zero development potential. Do you want your life to be like that?
- Total lack of expectations projected onto the friend
  For me this is a general principle, which thus includes deepfriendship. It's a given not to put much in the way of expectations on the people you see in a shop, or on the people who by chance happen to be your neighbours. Most of us will have the preference

2 But note that I mean resonance in the sense of two tuning forks with the same frequency – I especially do not mean deficient patterns resulting in emotional codependency. If one friend does more cooking and the other more cleaning, these are just practical complementary aspects.

that they don't turn out to be madmen with axes, and instead have a friendly smile for us. The predominant paradigma for partnership-style relationships is of exclusive one-on-one relationships, at least when it comes to physical intimacy and coping with everyday life. But these are expectations, be they implicit or agreed, which can produce great stress: Imagine you are in a moment or situation where there is a felt right course of action which runs counter to the vows or expectations of your conventional relationship? Then the stress will be within you. For this reason I put no expectations on another person, to not cause that kind of stress for them.

Hey, that sounds platonic

You might notice that none of the described qualities has anything to do with intimacy or conventional partnership. I only noticed it myself some weeks after writing the first draft of the article. On reflection, I don't want to add anything. So 'deepfriendship' applies equally to platonic and intimate relationships. So from now on I'll use 'intimate deepfriendship' to denote what for me has taken the place of conventional partnership.

While deepfriendship is of course a wonderful basis for intimacy, I am not implying that intimacy should only happen within deepfriendship. That would be a rule, and I don't ascribe to rules, rather to the empathy implied in Connectedness. Intimacy can happen when the moment is right, when the circumstances open that door. To notice that, you have to be open to the now, with no rules, promises, dogma or moral imperatives getting in the way.

Whoops, that sounds like anarchy

Indeed, as I've written about in another article ‚True freedom is when rules are no longer needed'. Rules become obsolete in a mature society, so also for relationships. If this still sounds bad to you, then perhaps you could reconsider your understanding of the term anarchy, or invent your own term for what I'm describing.

Deepfriendship qualities and spiritual insights

First, the compact form of the insights:

Dualities *Blind, Asleep*	Good/Bad: Judging, Clinging, Resisting, Ignoring => suffering.
Polarities *Accepting*	Qualities: Preferences instead of insistent value judgement.
Unity *Knowing*	Existence is a holistic Unity, all of which is available to directed conscious attention.
The Self *Awakened*	Identification with The Self, rather than "myself". The illusion of being an individual with free will has been relinquished.

Dualities *Blind, Asleep*	Good/Bad: Judging, Clinging, Resisting, Ignoring => suffering.
Liberation *At peace*	No-mind: Habitual thinking around 80% reduced, mental peace.

And then to look at the qualities of deepfriendship in relation to these states:

- Earnest reflection on experiences: We all learn through reflection on our experiences, so no basic problem here. But many people don't reflect honestly or deeply enough, the reflection may be tinged with thinking about how to gain personal advantage. The more you notice the basic non-separation, the more likely you are to reflect in a helpful way.
- Complete honesty: Honesty is promoted in general by society and religions. But how complete is honesty in practice? No white lies, no misleading people through omission? The higher someone's insight, the less they will be prone to bending the truth.
- No promises: This runs counter to the consensus paradigm, and I only became clear about it with the insight of The Self. When all identification as an individual has disappeared the illusion of being in control of life disappears as well. Then you completely understand that LIFE unfolds, and that there's so much which one individual can't shape. In fact, our ability to shape things exists only within the framework of the society which we live in. For example, in one country two people of the same sex can get married, in another country they might be killed for their love of each other. And societies change too...
- Total lack of expectations: This is in a way the other side of the coin 'No promises' – I make no promises to you, and have no expectations towards you. So here also the insight of The Self is very helpful to realise this quality in your own life.

Aspects of intimate deepfriendship in practice

Providing continuity e.g. for children or in ill health

My experience has been that the making of promises or vows has little relevance when confronted, sometimes many years afterwards, with circumstances which demand a response in the now. The vows try to enforce certain fixed structures for the rest of peoples lives, which is totally unrealistic – in western countries the divorce rate runs at about 40 to 50 percent of all marriages.

The noticing of connectedness is, in my experience, a better option: In a given situation, notice all the beings who will be affected by the course of action chosen (including yourself), and notice your non-separation from all of them. On that basis, then think creatively and feel what your guts have to say, and notice which course of action brings the most good for the most beings. This is the best which can be done. Note that the outco-

me *cannot* be found before the situation is there, as only then can you connect with those involved, with all their hopes and fears, as they exist at that time.

Example one: When my eldest daughter was about three, my then wife and I had an unfulfilling sexual relationship. However, we really wanted to stay together in the formative years of our daughter. So we both learned tantra (in fact life even moved us into the position of becoming tantra teachers); and we lived ten years of open marriage – open for sexual relationships with others. That was an exciting time, especially confronting ones own fear of loss and sexual jealousy. In the end, we went separate ways – but not before our daughter was thirteen (and the topic of sexual jealousy had been pretty much worked through).

Example two: In another article I wrote about my good friend X, born with multiple disabilities. Her limitations and traumas do mean that it's not always easy being with her (who's perfect?). However, one remarkable thing is, that X has never demanded anything of me; she's also a generous and fair person. Since we've known each other, X has moved three times – once to where I lived when we met, and twice as I myself moved to a new house. Each time she rents accommodation from me, and each time there is no question in me that I'll go on being there for her. To push her away is simply an idea that my heart balks at – it would be like being cruel to myself.

Being faithful or not regarding intimacy

A friend recently described an aspect of her view on relationship to me thusly: *I see a difference between remaining faithful and having the expectation of being the only intimate partner*.

If you look at the qualities of deepfriendship, as noted above, you'll notice that only qualities are listed, no specific dos or don'ts. But since the question of 'being faithful' is such a central dogma: The deepfriendship attitude on being faithful is that it's not on the map. Deepfriendship takes no explicit stance. But there are resulting implications of its principals: I put no expectations on my deepfriend, period. So also not about intimacy with another person, period. I for my part would also make no promise about it, in conformity with the 'no promises' quality of deepfriendship. But here don't forget the principle of complete honesty, which means I will communicate, and in that sense will be reliable. My communication will be near the time of noticing something needing communicating, and it will not hold back. I will never lie to a friend (or anyone else), or intentionally mislead someone. The friend will know exactly where they are with me. Isn't that better than having a relationship with someone who promises to be faithful and then deceives you behind your back?

Wanting the best for your friend and yourself

So often, in relationship it's about what a person can get for themselves. And a lot of the giving which does happen is actually a matter of cementing a relationship to make sure the person doing the giving gets what they want or thinks they need. So I'm talking about bringing giving and receiving into a natural flow, without hidden agendas, which I find simply joyful. I communicate what I enjoy and listen and think about what helps my friend and gives them pleasure. An example: I've had one or two girlfriends who, for different reasons, had a lack of sexual experience. So I helped them to find lovers with whom they could further explore the variety of intimacy in human relationships. This was a real win-win: I felt really good about being able to help, and they felt good about getting that experience which had been lacking.

Deepfriendship goes deep

I wrote the following to my dear deepfriend A.B.

Our bodies, with their needs and wants, are poles apart.

Our energy structures are each quite unique.

Our paths through life have gone very different ways.

Oh how much wonderful otherness to discover, to cherish!

And...

We are both empty.

I am nothing, and everything.

You are nothing, and everything.

We are parts of this Unity which we call Existence.

We are not separate; ultimately, we are both just part of the One.