

## Relationships - based on emotion or understanding?

Relationships can make or destroy a person's happiness. Life is a continuous stream of managing relationships beginning from one's own mother, father, siblings, relatives, friends and so on. And continued on to girlfriend/boyfriend, wife, husband, employer, employee, boss, neighbor etc etc. Relationships are of 2 types - one those that are thrust upon us and the others that we choose to get into. Until a certain point, probably around the age of 12 or so, relationships are thrust upon us. Primarily because one does not have much of choice and also because one is not fully capable of making intelligent decisions. Once a person becomes old enough to make independent choices then we choose to get into relationships and our happiness is directly proportional to how we manage relationships whether it is personal or professional. The issue unfortunately here is, **there is no universal guideline as to how a relationship has to be managed.** There cannot be one too, because the number of relationships is numerous and each one is infinitely dynamic and complicated.

Fortunately for us there are some pointer and clear directions available in the Upanishads which we can make use of and benefit from. There is one section in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad where this topic is elaborately dealt with even though the context is one that we do not normally encounter. But the topic of relationships is universally relevant and hence applicable to every human being irrespective of his/her background.

This section in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad is in the form of a dialogue between Yajnavalkya (husband) and universally renowned for his wisdom) and Maitreyi (his wife). Yajnavalkya gives all his wealth to his wife and seeks her permission to quit family life and live a life purely dedicated to contemplation on the truth of Oneself. Maitreyi refuses to give permission immediately but questions him whether she will get the same ananda from the wealth Yajnavalkya is relinquishing to her, or only by pursuing a life of contemplation!

Yajnavalkya truthfully replies that it is not possible by explaining that a person craves for anything in the world in the first place only for oneself (pleased self) and not for the sake of object itself. This seems obvious at first but Yajnavalkya continues by including all relationships on being based on this premise. A husband is dear to a wife not for the sake of the husband but only for herself. And vice-versa. Similarly a son is dear to one only for oneself and not for the sake of the Son. Likewise for wealth, a learned person, a warrior, various other planes of existence like svarga (heaven), Gods, other living beings etc.

The consequences of this knowledge, are tremendous. It means that every living being is by design 'self-ish' and what this Self is needs to be understood. In relationships this "selfishness" translates to meaning **every relationship is need based**. Need for me that I should not keep holding on to but try to grow out of. If this fact is clear then it has the capacity to be life-changer! The need can be emotional, physical, psychological etc. When there is clarity and acceptance about the nature of this need there is the possibility of growing out of this requirement. Otherwise one gets caught up and sucked into it without knowing how to overcome it.

When one does not clearly understand that this need is primarily for myself, then we assume that we are doing things for someone else and start having expectations from that person. Expectations in the form of particular behaviour, attitude, actions. **Expectations turn into demands. Demands give rise to the desire to control. When control is never possible anger results. Where there is anger one loses control over oneself and utters damaging words. Eventually relationship sours. This whole sequence (described clearly in the Bhagavad Gita - Verses 2.62, 63) happens inevitably whenever any relationship is based on a personal need.** And unfortunately all relationships are! And this fact needs to be carefully contemplated and meditated upon.

Also **when I understand that the relationship is primarily my own need then my demands reduce and I learn to accept whatever I get out of it because primarily it is my need rather than the other person's.** Whatever the other party does is his/her choice. There is no reason to be disappointed, dissatisfied or unhappy. The other party completely goes out of the equation here! If I have grown out of the need, then I can choose to break the relationship. If not I continue it for my own needs. This also junks the popular idea that one does anything for the sake of someone else. Anything anyone does is only for oneself fundamentally. Never for anyone else! Even if it is some kind of seemingly "selfless" service. It is done only in return for the happiness (pleased self) one gets.

No relationship lasts forever. This may seem obvious but a lot of problems arise because of the tendency to cling on to relationships. Again this is a result of one's own personal need because of the sub conscious assumption that I will suffer if the relationship does not last. It happens very obviously in a parent-child, husband-wife, sibling relationships etc. Vedanta says that when there is a clear understanding of the fundamental premise of relationships, no relationship is binding and at the same time all relationships are beautiful so that they can be cherished and enjoyed as long as they last.

The converse (breaking relationships at whim) is not true either!

In India there is this widespread tendency to not consciously "break" relationships. This is because of the cultural link to spirituality which clearly says that relationships are meant to last as long as their purpose (of growing out of the need) is not satisfied. This is why divorce is still not very socially acceptable because marriages are supposed to be made in heaven! The same logic applies to the joint family system which had been followed for centuries and is still valued in traditional homes. **Relationships need to last as long as they serve the purpose and drop off automatically either voluntarily or involuntarily.** If one does not utilise the golden opportunity to grow out of the relationship then one needs to wait until karma provides an opportunity again. It may be in this lifetime or in some later lifetime.

Relationships have to be understood and not just looked at emotionally.

Love is the driving force behind any relationship and it is primarily just an attraction based on emotion. That is why in the section of Brhadaranyaka Upanishad Yajnavalkya is asking for permission to leave Maitreyi because he understands the basis of love. An emotional relationship based only on love without understanding the basis, is not sustainable and is a clear recipe for disaster. If for instance we take the relationship of marriage, it is most significant because it is supposed to be for the longest term. Most marriages run into trouble because the expectations from one side seem to be unsatisfied. If the need is purely physical (emotional) then one is going to be dissatisfied very soon because beauty decreases with age. If it is very emotional then it leads to possessiveness and eventually choking the other person.

**So when one keeps holding onto the needs then one never focuses on the fundamental problem of Self dissatisfaction.** And when one's requirements are too many then naturally one tends to become too selfish and forget what the other person's needs/requirements are. The only way out of this impasse is to reduce expectation and completely get rid of them in time. Then the question arise as to why one should get rid of expectation? The Upanishads say that any expectation/demand arises primarily because one is dissatisfied with oneself. Usually overcoming this dissatisfaction is attempted by increasing demands from the outside world but this never works. One needs to overcome this dissatisfaction only by knowing that satisfaction (pleased self) is always comes from within. This seems to be a tall order but when there is clarity with regard to this, then every relationship becomes a means for both parties to gain emotional maturity and the relationship itself becomes enjoyable and worthwhile. It is a win-win situation.

Eventually demands reduce only when the sense of **I** i.e. individuality reduces and there is a fusion/one-ness with the external world. This fusion is what the Upanishads say is the ultimate purpose of human life and there in exists absolute peace and harmony. In other words, pleased self is one's own intrinsic nature.

This is the reason Yajnavalkya wants to quit family life (grow out of his need) and also all his wealth without allowing his need to consume and destroy him. This is the reason Sannyasa (renunciation) is glorified in the Hindu tradition because it means that the person has grown out of all his needs and is at peace with whatever is available. **Understanding that a relationship is based on one's own need makes it mutually beneficial, makes us more responsible and accountable too.** If I understand this fact I will try to grow out of it. If not I will get sucked into it. Choice is ours!

Article is by Swami Sarvananda Saraswati

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