

TOWARD A LASTING
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP
(PART I)

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Human beings have a need to be perceived as valuable by those they value. Such reciprocal valuing leads to various degrees of love. And the highest form of love, between two soulmates who are also lovers, is romantic love.

An ideal romantic relationship is a thoroughly unique type of relationship. Unlike any other, it involves in its full expression the reciprocal response of the total being of one individual to the total being of another individual. It is an emotional, intellectual, and sexual union, a total union of two souls who recognized each other as mates and who became committed to each other in order to share their innermost values, hopes, and desires. When such a union exists, it becomes an oasis in which the two soulmates can reveal to each other the deepest and most intimate aspects of their being. It becomes a private place where mutual encouragement and support permit each of them to recharge in order to cope with the sometimes difficult demands of life. It becomes a union in which one lives more fully for oneself by also living for another. A place for sharing sexual pleasure without fear and with complete trust. And, while it can sometimes mean pain, sorrow, anger, and despair, temporarily inflicted by the partner, it is a union in which each can become more complete—a union which makes life even more worth living.

We know that most couples start their relationship with hope of such a union. Flushed with anticipation of a happy journey together through life, many nevertheless end with serious disappointments.

What are some of the causes of such frequently occurring romantic unhappiness? Can it be avoided, and are there ways which can help individuals achieve a more lasting and happier romantic relationship?

This, ladies and gentlemen, is my topic for today.

I want to point out at the outset the difficulties and challenges each couple faces in forming a romantic relationship. Very few grasp the enormity of the task ahead of them. After the initial phase of the romantic relationship, which is often fueled by a physical attraction based on unwarranted subconscious projection of values but little actual knowledge of each other, the partners have the following assignment: They are to continue to pursue their individual values in life; to get to know each other well; to sustain the highest romantic interest in each other; to continue to enjoy each other physically; to make life together exciting, based on continuous admiration for each other, while coping with the daily demands and stresses of life. Furthermore, they are charged with accomplishing all this by working out methods of bridging the differences between two individuals with different backgrounds, psychologies, goals, and expectations and thereby creating the basis for a smoothly flowing, friction-free interaction.

Few of us are prepared for the task.

The first matter I want to deal with is a relationship between two people, married or otherwise, which cannot actually be considered romantic because the differences are so great that the parties are mismatched. In therapy, that is what I try to determine as soon as possible, because no matter how hard the couple is willing to try, when the differences are fundamental, romantic happiness is not possible, and the relationship is doomed in most cases. Even if such a couple stays together, one or both of the parties remains unhappy. When fundamental differences exist, no compromise is possible because the respective needs of the two individuals cannot be fulfilled.

In my experience, a couple usually turns out to be mismatched as a result of the mistakes one or both individuals made in *selecting* each other as romantic partners. These are individuals who were never right for each other.

Mistakes in selection can occur for a variety of reasons. Among the most important are: 1) The individuals did not know or had not identified their core evaluations—namely, their basic and personal evaluations about life, self, and others—and/or they did not know their specific romantic values—values they respond to with attraction (such as a way of coming at life, a particular style—essentially the total package that one is attracted to). 2) One or both, at the time of the commitment, mistakenly believed they held a particular romantic value, but later found they did not, indeed, that they valued the opposite. 3) One or both individuals may have known their romantic values but misapplied them. 4) The selection was made to satisfy the neurotic need of one or both of the partners. In addition, in most cases an important contributing factor to such mistakes in selection is that the two individuals committed to each other very early in the relationship. Had they waited, they would have gotten to know each other better. As a result, they might have discovered that they had fundamental differences, and might have parted.

Most romantic alliances begin with intense mutual attraction. Such attraction usually occurs with little knowledge of the person one is attracted to. On the surface, it is difficult to say why one person can feel such a strong personal and sexual attraction toward someone he or she doesn't know. Indeed, it is almost impossible to trace directly the thousands of romantic value judgments which each individual makes during his or her lifetime and which culminate in such an attraction. But what we do know is that sexual attraction comes from subconscious content. Each individual forms subconscious associations which lead him or her to assume that the presence of certain physical characteristics in another person automatically means the presence of certain values he or she desires. For example, a certain look, a smile, or a way of moving may be interpreted as a certain kind of sense of life, the look of an ambitious person, the presence of extreme intelligence, etc. In

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the light of such subconscious associations and the intense attraction they cause, it is easy to assume that one has found the soulmate one has been seeking all along. The attraction itself seems to be the proof.

Having subconsciously endowed in this way the object of their attraction with desired attitudes, values, character, and personality traits, the lovers proceed to idealize each other and thus to act ahead of their actual knowledge of one another. In addition, they usually become sexually involved in this early phase—which means that they become intimate without a sufficient basis for intimacy. Then, as they get to know each other better, they often develop a vested interest in maintaining their subconscious projections. They continue to see similarities in their values where few or none exist. They observe traits selectively so that they see only good ones, and give glamorized interpretations to actions or traits of the partner that they don't approve of.

In this period, most individuals also do some role playing. Fearful of revealing too much about themselves, they are careful to put their best foot forward. Often, secretly or subconsciously not feeling lovable, they try to hide anything that might endanger the romance in case the partner disapproves. The result of this combination of factors is the selection of a partner based on wishful thinking and fantasy, rather than on real knowledge of one another. Yet true love requires real knowledge of one another—knowledge acquired by clear thinking over an extended period of time.

Such clear thinking, required for correct selection, must be based on self-knowledge and on the ability to judge others: on knowing and identifying clearly one's personal values in all areas of life including specifically romantic values, and on seeing clearly the values of the other. Each person has a hierarchy of personal needs and values. The hierarchy varies from individual to individual. But the more clearly a person can identify his romantic needs (what he must have) and his wants (what he would like to have but which is not essential), and provided such values are rational, the more likely he will know at the outset what type of person he likes, who is a good romantic candidate for him, whom he could be friends with, and whom he can respond to sexually.

For example, if a woman clearly recognizes that she needs to find a man who is highly intelligent, then in spite of any strong attraction to a man that she might feel on the basis of subconscious projection, she will consciously look for that quality and if she does not find it, will not yield to the attraction. Thus she will not develop a vested interest in maintaining the subconscious projection, and the attraction will soon diminish. She will know that this is not a romantic partner for her. Her conscious knowledge will win out over the subconscious projection.