DOUBLE LOSS OR DOUBLE GAIN
IN THE WONDERLAND OF
COMPANIONSHIP

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It is very natural for man and woman each to seek the company of the other. Man needs woman and woman needs man. But this coming together of man and woman need not necessarily be the only kind of companionship. It can also be man seeking man or woman seeking woman. If you read the several dialogues of Plato, you can see that in Athens in his time, a man seeking a woman was considered to be less moral than a man seeking the companionship of a man. The recent development in most Western countries is to look upon such relationships as strange; those who disapprove of such companionship between people of the same sex use terms like homosexual, lesbian, etc. But the main thing is that we need company, and for that there are many possibilities.

There is a very idealistic view that a person’s best friend is one’s own self, where "one’s own self" is to be taken as one’s higher Self. This Self can be the same as God, or it can be the same as Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and Wisdom. If you turn to that kind of companionship with your higher Self, you can experience it as loving beauty; it can be a search through the creation of beautiful things or filling yourself with the great glory of beauty in which you feel fulfillment.

You can also experience companionship with your Self by getting absorbed in benevolent service. There your God is not just a person, but all the persons around you. St. Francis of Assisi was seeking his Self, his companionship with God, by serving the lepers or whoever was in need. In that case, the higher Self is the goodness that he lived through his actions.

Another form of companionship with your higher Self is when you seek your meaning in word-wisdom such as in the consolation of philosophy. Take for instance Boethius, who was locked up in a prison with no light except one single ray of the sun which came in through a hole in the roof. This man, who was sitting all alone, saw this beam. It became very meaningful to him; it became his companion. He saw in that light the beautiful face of Sophia, the goddess of wisdom. Thereafter, she was his best friend in that dark cellar. The dialogue between Boethius and Sophia is given in his wonderful book called the Consolations of Philosophy.

Companionship with beauty, companionship with goodness, and companionship with wisdom: these have all been idealized through ages and
there are a number of people who have been actualizing these ideals. To Christian mystics of the Catholic school, to Buddhist and Jain seekers, and to Hindu sannyasis, this kind of devotion is not a mere ideal. It is a reality. The search for the Absolute or God in Beauty, Goodness, and Knowledge is praised in all countries and there is a voluminous literature about the lives of such people and their experiences. For instance, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James refers to the lives of many such people who were celibate or who kept up their virginity for the sake of finding their companionship in God, impersonal Truth, or mystical elation in doing service to others. Virginity is here to be taken in a wider and deeper sense than usual. It means keeping up the freshness of the soul from moment to moment in everything one sees or thinks or feels. It is the newness with which you open up yourself, like the blooming of a bud. You do not allow yourself to be spoiled by the experiences of the past; whatever has happened to mar the beauty of the soul is pushed away as irrelevant. You are always on onward march. You do not look behind in remorse. In the Bible, Lot’s wife is said to have become a pillar of salt because she looked back. There is no turning back; all the bridges behind you are burned and you are going forward forever. That is one kind of companionship in the Absolute.

There are others who are not so idealistic as the mystics. They seek companionship with their Self by actualizing beauty, goodness and wisdom of a worldly order. Take for instance Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo or any of the artists from cavemen up to the present who seek to express beauty through art. The expression of beauty can vary from the charm of external form to the specific manifestation of moods or other psychic phenomena. Mood has great beauty. Capturing beautiful moods and reliving them in works of art and literature is also an actualization of beauty. Artists try to capture all the variegations of beauty in the painting or sculpture or other forms of fine arts. To them, married life is normal, and yet their main pursuit is the actualization of higher values. There are people of active temperament who seek self-expression through charitable acts or acts of self-sacrifice. Now take the example of poets or creative writers. They may not be mystical. They may be married or unmarried. That’s not important. Their married life, their companionship with a wife or husband and children, comes only secondary or they make it instrumental in their
actualization of beauty, goodness and wisdom. This is one model of companionship.

Another model is: you want a companion because self-expression and sharing are necessary. You want to love and be loved. Also, some people may want to have progeny. Bringing forth progeny is somewhat optional, but to love and be loved, share and express yourself—these are imperative. You cannot express yourself without allowing your companion also to express. Thus your mutual expressions bring sharing. In this kind of sharing sex becomes a major factor. The sexual implications can be either a sexual release at the physical level or of a sublimated nature, which need not necessarily be wholly physical. Sexual love can be of higher erotics as well as lower erotics. Plato speaks of the two kinds of Eros, the divine and also the earthly. The divine Eros takes you to higher realms of sublime values such as artistic, poetic, or mystical, and the earthly Eros to gross sex only.

These are all innate psychological needs. Sermonizing and telling people what the good life is and how one should live it is not of much help when people do not know how to change their basic nature. Great teachings of perennial wisdom are given in the *Dhammapada*, the Bible, and in many, many other books. In spite of reading and listening to sermons generation after generation, man has not improved much. He stands where he was. What *ought to be* is one thing, and what *is*, is another. We have to understand what is. What ought to be comes only after knowing what is. You are equipped in a certain way, and if you do not have the necessary equipment to accomplish a particular thing, you will have to abandon that pursuit. You have to see that your goal is always in tune with your equipment. If I don't have wings I should walk or make a mechanical device to fly. Mere wishing won't grow wings.

We come to this world with certain innate necessities, though man is better than many species in that he has a wide range of choices. Take for instance a person like Socrates who was socially obligated to play the role of a husband to an almost impossible woman called Xanthippe. He even produced children with her. But she was not much of a companion to him. He had the greater need of philosophically expressing himself. In the early morning he would go to the Agora and wait for his victims. He was just like a spider waiting for its prey.
When some young Plato or someone came in, he would pounce on them and start questioning his listener. He used all sorts of tactics to find people for encounter. He even used his breakfast as bait to lure hungry souls to listen to him and talk with him. He had a great need to talk and to question people. He assumed what he called the role of the gadfly; he wanted to stimulate others to think. Then alone he felt satisfied. His sexual need was not as compulsive as the higher one, the sublime urge to contemplate and seek the Self. Fortunately he found Plato. They were a typical pair of Guru and sishya. However, if one looked at their relationship from the present viewpoints of modern Freudian psychiatry or psychology, one might see it as a case of homosexuality. Was their relationship homosexual? They never thought so. To them it was a very healthy relationship in which they could share the experiencing of a profound truth. Like Socrates and Plato, we have the Buddha and Ananda, Jesus Christ and Peter. These great masters were relating themselves to their disciples to transmit their great teachings, the dialectics of wisdom, the fourfold Aryan path, and the immortal gospel of Love. Their relationship was spiritual companionship. This kind of relationship, whether it is between man and woman or man and man or woman and woman, is termed platonic.

There are some people who have not anything great to share. They experience a kind of inner vacuum that needs to be filled. For this, they may go in for a secret union with someone—man, woman, anyone—with whom they can get into a relationship. As the situation is meant to be secretive, there is always the fear of being discovered. Such a union may cause guilt and—if they are found out by the society—it may cause humiliation. In medieval Europe this could lead the "sinners" to be burned at the stake. Secret union may lead to tragedy. Thus there may be great love and great exchange of the sharing of expression, but those who are involved in it have the drawback of always being on the lookout for some intruder, someone prowling into their secrecy. That can be very annoying and it takes away the serene sense of timelessness that makes companionship a great joy.

There is another way to seek companionship. That is indulging in prostitution. This is an age-old institution. In all ancient cities prostitution was a well-established panacea for the repressed. Although now restricted in some
places, you can purchase companionship by paying a certain amount of money. You can buy two hours companionship or six hours companionship or a day’s companionship. In this kind of relationship, there is not much guilt because you are paying for it. You do not have any obligations because there is no love involved in this kind of clandestine relationship. Only, you have to pretend love during the period of contract. Both partners know they are pretending. The kind of satisfaction that it gives is temporary release. This is a very poor substitute for love or companionship.

Another model is the highly recognized institution of marriage. Recognized marriage only promises companionship and does not guarantee it. For example, take the case of Socrates and Xanthippe. They were a solemnly wedded couple but their companionship was meager. One may have his or her wedded wife or husband, and yet it is possible that either of them may need some other kind of companionship. The most important thing is to achieve wholesomeness in companionship. How many levels of companionship are there in married life? This question is to be looked into to understand the stability and meaning of marriage.

Marriage was made a monopolistic institution of a man being the sole possessor of a woman because it was mainly instituted by man and not woman. Man used, and in many communities still uses, woman as a kind of chattel, something that can be purchased or sold or exchanged. In many countries, marriage alliances between families are established to enhance their economic stability. In ancient days this was practiced by royal dynasties for their national security. Woman was a kind of prize that man could give or exchange to purchase his gratification of greed or lust. This is the most ignoble side of human history. And yet, we were indulging in this viciousness and are still doing it to a great extent, even though most of us pretend that is not the case.

There are many difficulties in finding the right person whom you want enter into marriage with. You cut through the difficulties of social ban only to find that you are imprisoned in another social trap and then you want to get out of it. To many people, marriage becomes a cage, a prison. How can we make
marriage—which takes away the freedom of many people and cramps and stifles their lives—into something beautiful?

Beautiful things happen more by chance or providential Grace than by careful planning. Chance and what we call providential Grace are not two things. We are only giving two names to an unexplainable event. If you do not believe that God is administering all benevolent things from behind, you may have to believe that everything happens by coincidence or Chance. In that case, chance is to be taken as chance with a capital C. Some think that everything happens by coincidence by laws of nature, such as the random hitting of billiard balls. According to the physicists, molecules hit one another and thus make a cause and effect relationship that accounts for all physical manifestations. If this is the case, the randomness in nature is so superior that its sheer coincidence can make a Shakespeare and the same randomness can even make a Shakespeare write a Hamlet. That randomness which seems to make consistent meaning and provide for the contiguity of the universe is what we call providential Grace.

Your coming upon a certain woman or man can be called a chance-like providence or a grace-like chance. You are coming together to share your life. You are seeking companionship. Your search for a companion can be for a short period or for a whole lifetime. Our nature is such that when we are partially stimulated, we respond totally. You say, "Oh, I have never come across anyone like you. Wonderful. For the rest of my life, you are my person." "The rest of my life"—you do not know for how many days this is going to last. But you are absolutely sincere in taking that resolve. At that time you cannot think of anything less than an eternal relationship. After having made your decision, you make it known to all. At first, the relatives take the initiative to formalize that relationship. State now moves in because the state has a responsibility to safeguard your properties, children, and things like that. To make the marriage legally valid there are legislated laws. If you do not legalize the marriage the companionship is considered to be a private or secret relationship. In that case the state owns no responsibility. Then church comes in and says, "You happen to be in our diocese, your parents are Presbyterian. You cannot do as you like. This is our tradition. You have to get married in our church, with our minister, and you have to repeat a certain oath of allegiance." Thus your companionship
becomes a big affair of the church, the state, and your family. The society and the families prevail upon the church to make the bond strong and valid. Thus you are hedged in from all sides. Now it is no more a mere companionship; it has become a social contract. Thus you come to the public stage to dance to the tune of social expectations wearing a steel jacket.

According to the social contract, approved by society, state and church, the number one role of the woman is to act as wife, of the man is to be her husband. If he chauvinistic he thinks, "Now I should have a monopoly over this woman. She should be exclusively my wife." In the same manner, a jealous wife thinks "I have a monopoly over this man. He should exclusively be my husband." It is tacitly understood that no one else should have any relationship with the other person except of an order that is socially accepted and traditionally approved. In many cases, the individual may resent a behavior of his or her partner even if it is acceptable to their tradition and may become very jealous and threatened. Monopoly causes jealousy. When suspicion is aroused, there is a need for the husband to be on the lookout to see if his wife is trespassing the limits of the sacred bond of their marriage. The wife could be even more suspicious and paranoid. While being trusted husband and wife, they are also spying on each other. This social situation is leading and even compelling them to be on the track of each other's "intelligence" all the time.

Let us take away this assumed monopoly of a husband and wife possessing each other. Let the church, the state and the society not interfere with the married couple. Suppose they can forget that they are husband and wife; they can still continue to be good companions. If they continue to be companions without feeling obliged to play any square role, they keep their freedom. We are here speaking of a freedom that is non-specific and undefined. It is for each couple to define it for themselves. The definition that the man gives to their mutual freedom should be agreeable to the woman; and the definition of the woman should be reciprocally agreeable to the man. This is not very likely. At this point there comes a breakdown of communication.

In a structured family the definition of roles is very important. The most important of these are the husband role and wife role. Until very recently the husband’s role was that of the breadwinner. And the wife's role was to keep the
home and rear the children. But should it be that way always? There can be sharing in the bread winning and there can be sharing in the rearing of the family. Sharing does not mean writing a schedule and putting it there and saying, "Tom washes the dishes on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and changes the diapers of the baby on Thursday, Friday and Saturday." It should come more spontaneously. When you make a contract, it is very likely that you will break it meticulously day after day. The making and breaking of the contract brings the debris of good intentions and consequent guilt feelings into life. The freshness of life and the chance to be creative, spontaneous, and lovingly supportive becomes aborted by the making of fixed and mechanically conceived schedules.

There are other roles, too, such as those of father and mother. All these roles of husband-wife, father-mother, the breadwinner and the keeper of the home, and so on and so forth, fill the lives of most people up to the nose and marriage becomes a nauseating terror. Not even a little space is left in the couple's life for them to be free of obligations. They forget that all this started from the beautiful feeling of friendship. Many couples even forget that they were once friends. Before becoming sexually intimate these couples were brothers and sisters. Where is that brother now? Where is that sister? These two people can certainly play many, many other interesting roles apart from being just husband and wife or father and mother.

Take for instance the role of the friend. Nothing can enrich their life more than that. There is real greening of the family when friendship is made the hub of family life. You don't have to be 24 hours a wife or 24 hours a husband. On your promise that you will not adhere to our proposal, let us give you a schedule. You can be four hours a wife or husband, three hours a friend. Should you be always holding onto each other's hand and saying "Friend, friend" or saying "Husband, wife?" No. Sometimes you can be strangers. It is good to be strangers. That will give a little space between you so that you can be on your own. Strangers do not share their lives. They guard their secrets. You don't have to tell all your secrets to your wife or to your husband. Why should you? You can sometimes treat the other as a stranger and say, "I want to be alone." It is important to be alone. Even the best lovers, when they clasp each other and hug, do not remain frozen in that
hug for ever. After a while they push the other person away. There is nothing
called an eternal kiss except perhaps in Rodin's sculpture.

Here is another interesting role that you can play. You need a critic. Every
time you say something your mate does not have to say "Yes, yes." A categorical
"No" can be very helpful to reconsider and revalue your stalemate value
conditioning. When a spouse says "No" he or she should say why they do not
agree. That way each can be a healthy critic. If you find a healthy critic in your
companion, you will have a vast living space of freedom in which your
friendship can thrive. You cannot criticize a person if you don't have the freedom
to express yourself frankly and sincerely. This freedom becomes most enjoyable
when it stabilizes and secures deep understanding between the mates. The
freedom we speak of here does not come from the roles of the husband, the wife,
the mother, the father, the brother, the sister, or the stranger. It comes only from
the critic. The critic in you is the touchstone that can decide the worthwhileness
of all intimate relationships. If that criticism is brightening up your relation, that
means your love is becoming more and more meaningful. If you find that it
doesn't work, it is not necessary that you should prolong the agony of being
together. There is great sacredness in mutual relationships only when
companionship is nurtured and lived in unhindered and meaningful freedom.

If there is no freedom, you are a slave. You should not be enslaved by
your attachment. Attachment is not love. Only love is love. Attachment is
bondage; it is a golden fetter of obligation. Freedom is not license. License is
becoming capricious. Capricious license can make clowns and not friends.
Choose your freedom to stand at different angles and look at the same thing and
then invite your friend also to share it. You can say, "From this angle I see this
and from that angle I see that. Come have a look at this fascinating perspective."
If there is that sharing, then your life becomes very much enriched. So now we
have a schedule to fill our day of companionship: sister or brother half an hour,
stranger one hour, aloneness one hour, critic two hours, half an hour hysteria,
five minutes of candid truth and the rest to be husband and wife when you are
not eating, sleeping, or preoccupied with your ten thousand and one other
interests in life. (I am only joking; you don't have to have any rigid time table.)
Somehow, when we are in love and have our friendship established, we have a feeling that the other person should be available to us. In terms of the availability of your companion, you are likely to become selfish. When you crave for the physical availability of the other, he or she may be engaged in something or may just be wanting to rest. You need to use your discretion and develop an intuition to see when your friend is available. If you intrude on your friend and make a demand, saying, "You are my wedded husband or you are my wedded wife, so you ought to do this," you are heading for trouble. There's no such "ought to do." In the free choice that makes companionship sweet and meaningful, you have chosen to become friends by your free will, and you should cherish that free will. Your love is both to give freely and also to receive freely. In our impatience sometimes it may seem rather impossible to find our companion available, but learn to have patience.

The true lover is also the beloved. The lover and the beloved are not two people. The lover is the beloved of the other and the beloved is a lover of the lover. They are exchangeable terms. The lover/beloved is always so much moved by an almost divine feeling that takes away from him/her the ego of assertion or submission. You are not submitting yourself as a slave, but you are offering yourself as a sacrament. There is great joy in making yourself available as an offering to the beloved. When you are making yourselves thus available to each other with such spontaneity, with such joy, you do not think you are doing a favor. On the other hand, you feel honored that you are given an occasion to help, to share, to serve. There is no superiority or inferiority involved in this giving and taking. Giving a blessing is as great as receiving the blessing. When we understand companionship in this sense the possibility of expressing love becomes very much expanded.

We make a big deal of the idealistic love of the mystics. However, marriage can be as much an ideal as that, or an even greater ideal, because in this kind of companionship you are asked play several roles. When you play all these roles gracefully, you become harmonious. Again the idea of harmony brings us back to the concept of freedom that is equated with love. The question that arises when we identify love with freedom is: Freedom of what? Love of what? The Upanishads say you do not love the husband for the sake of the
husband, but for the sake of the joy of your Self. You do not love the wife for the sake of the wife, but for the sake of the joy of your Self. In this Upanishadic dictum, the Self that is spoken of is not the ego. There is a greater Self that lurks beneath the surface of the ego-consciousness. It is this greater Self that brings attraction to everything in life. Love is the magic key to discover this higher Self. Freedom is a release from social conditionings to make a breakthrough to go beyond the pale of the ego crust.

When we go for a walk in the morning, we hear all kinds of little little whispering sounds around us. The rose says: "Hi, you people." So we turn to the rose: "Oh, you are here; how are you?" And then we hear the little blade of grass saying: "I am here, too." And the snail is on the way, it says: "Hi, be careful, I cannot move fast." Wherever you go, it is full of life and there are all kinds of beauty everywhere to greet you: the sunlight from above, and the breeze that comes from ancient seas, and music in the air and all kinds of birds singing for you. Everywhere you find such beauty, such joy, such wonder. In this happy pilgrimage and procession called life you are going on and on. You can share all this with your companion. In this kind of sharing, it is the Self that you are discovering in every attraction that greets you as friends, flowers, birds, breezes, dewdrops, and even the teardrops that mirror in them the insignia of love. The promise of life is to envelop you, immerse you, and give you a magic carpet to float over the clouds of confusions and distrust to discover the native land of the soul's favorite pasture. When you experience that, you can say, "I am experiencing my Self; I am experiencing Love; I am experiencing the grand freedom of my true Being." When you love the rose, you don't get into any special contract with it and say: "Oh, rose, tomorrow at this time I will come and again kiss you." No. You don't. All these sharings of love with nature, people, and even with our own passing thoughts are casual and spontaneous. There is joy in it when we do not structure relationships into stereotyped patterns.

In our universities we teach physics and chemistry so that we may make all kinds of chemical things which can be advertised and sold, etc. We teach engineering to put up big, massive constructions. We teach medicine so that we can turn people into patients and patients into clients and consequently customers of pharmaceuticals. But we have forgotten one thing. We do not pay
any heed to teach sensibility, to make people more sensible to appreciate values. Nobody seems to train our eyes to look for vistas of beauty. How great is the value of tenderness! Think of the value of tenderness when you touch, when you touch with your mind, of the tenderness when you caress with your eyes, and the tenderness of your consoling word. Which university is teaching people to be tender? Who takes pain to cultivate such sensibility in children's minds? There we are at a loss. When it comes to a matter of learning values, we are still in the elementary classes, trying to learn only how to bake bread or find the means to bake bread. Jesus said: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." But every word that comes from the mouth of God is not a gilt-edged book. The word of God is the expression of life that is abundantly manifesting around us in so many ways and it is up to us to participate in that with joyous gratitude. Marriage also should be looked upon as a God-given grace of finding your companionship for a lifetime, a companionship to share with children, friends, neighbors, and everything in life. To live such a meaningful marriage, we have to re-educate ourselves so that we may have healthier norms and healthier relationships.

In our hunt for ideals and values, we have been speaking of what ought to be. What "is" has been forgotten. Now we have to take into account what is desired and what is desirable. Moving from what you desire to what is desirable is accomplished not by circumventing what you desire, but by re-educating your value sense so that the gap between what is desired and what is desirable can be diminished and bridged. Some of the things we call desirable are pre-fixed notions which are hurled upon us by some old religious fanatic or maybe put into the mouth of some great teacher by fanatical religious propagandists. We do not know which exhortation comes from a fanatic and which comes from a wise man. So we have to be somewhat wary about the ideals and the great moral that are handed down to us by religious traditions and social conventions. Morals that suit a certain age and a certain place need not necessarily be a model for all times.

There is an undying eternity that is again and again reborn in us. Schrodinger gives an example of a certain man who is walking into the Alpine mountains and sees the morning sun illuminating a certain glacier and he feels a
great thrill. He wants to capture that and make it an eternal joy. So he paints it and it is sold to some museum. After five hundred years, a man walks into the museum where it is kept and looks at the painting. He becomes awed; he cannot move away. Schrodinger asks: "How do you know that he is not the person who painted it five hundred years ago?" He's not saying that this is a reincarnation of the same person but that the creation of beauty springs from the same source that evokes a reciprocal appreciation of it. This is what Keats speaks of: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever."

Even after two thousand five hundred years when we repeat the word of the Buddha; after two thousand years, when we repeat the word of Jesus Christ, it sounds in our ears with the ring of truth. The other day I read out a few lines of the *Tirukural* of Tiruvalluvar to my friend. To her those words sounded so true even though the book was written three thousand years ago. That means humanity has one collective Self that never changes. This is the very Self that gives you your ultimate freedom. It is the shimmering glow behind all values and all relationships of intimacy such as of a husband, a wife, a child or friends. Conversely all experiencing of intimacy should lead us to the discovery of the intimation of this immortal Self.