

What the Buddha Says About Couples

"In five ways should a husband minister to his wife:

By respecting her, by being kind to her, by being faithful to her, by giving her authority, by adoring her."

As we can see, caring for one's wife centers on giving attention to her as a person both loveable and competent. He not only is told to give her fidelity but also authority. Today, we expect such equal partnering but many years ago, this was shocking advice. Notice there is no hint of hierarchy and the focus is on the husband's emotional vows to his wife.

When was the last time you did something romantic for your wife? Bought her flowers for no reason except that you just wanted to say "I love you"? When is the last time you sent your wife a thoughtful card and listed her most special qualities? When have you asked for, and truly listened to her advice? And actually followed it? When was the last time you spent a private, intimate evening simply adoring her?

"In five ways should a wife ministered to by her husband, love him: by performing her duties well, by giving hospitality to their relatives, by being faithful to him, by supervising their money, and by skillfully doing all her work."

Here, a wife is asked to be an equal, a worldly partner, to handle the relationship responsibilities, particularly in the area of managing money. The advice seems to focus on her competence and command. In contrast to the husband's emotional focus, Buddha emphasizes a wife's organizational duties.

When is the last time you made sure the household tasks were well organized and completed? When was the last time you were efficiently on time and prepared? When did you last pay the bills, manage the investments and set a budget which you followed? When did you last contact your relatives (yours and his) and let them know you're thinking about them?

Of course, there is no set of rules that work for every couple. Nonetheless, the suggestions above might be a good place to begin reflecting on what you can bring to your relationship to move it to another level. It's interesting to note, however, that the one requirement that was made for both husband and wife was that they each be faithful. Only in that integrity and commitment can a lasting relationship blossom.