

# DON'T PURSUE A WITHDRAWER

## *Relationship tips from Dr. Darek Dawda*

BY MATHILDA WATERS



*MW: I have a different challenge for you this time, Dr Dawda. My close friend is having difficulties with his date. He tries hard to make it work, but she fluctuates between giving him hope, then taking it away. She opens up to him and then shuts down. They spent a great weekend together; then she wouldn't answer his phone calls for a week.*

Dr. DD: Is it possible that your friend is trying too hard? That his pursuit of her might be pushing her further away from him?

*MW: How would that work?*

Dr. DD: If somebody is moving away from you, it is usually counter-productive to pursue that person. Pursuit typically makes the withdrawer withdraw even more. Your friend would likely be better off to refocus his energy away from her and stop pursuing her in any way. This means cutting down on phone calls, emails, accidental meetings, guilt trips, or explanations of what he meant when he said what he said.

*MW: Just let her go?*

Dr. DD: Yes. And if he does, she might be more drawn to him. No guarantees, of course, because her ambivalence might signal an upcoming end to their relationship regardless of his actions.

*MW: 'Let her go' is the last thing my friend will want to hear.*

Dr. DD: That is precisely the tragedy of people who are caught in their desire. Your friend wants what he wants and may refuse to respect that his date wants something else.

*MW: A few months ago she told him she loved him. Was she lying to him?*

Dr. DD: During the initial stage of a romantic relationship, you are under influence of powerful chemical forces. You get intoxicated, and tend to idealize your lover and relationship. You say 'I love you,' and mean it. But this initial period of infatuation ends, and then reality sets in. And sometimes you don't like what you see and how you feel in the relationship, and you might start feeling ambivalent. On the most basic level, one needs to realize that relationships are in constant flux, constantly moving, transforming, and changing. There is no freezing of love or desire.

*MW: Are you saying that we have little control over the whims of our attraction?*

Dr. DD: That's right. Desire commands us in ways that are largely beyond our control. Attraction is deep seated. It works at the level of feeling, at the level of the body. We can choose our actions, but can't directly choose our feelings. We can deny ourselves what we feel, but that might only make our desire stronger. We can compromise our desire, but that may bring us unhappiness. I believe it is important to respect the forces of attraction that rise within you and within others.

*MW: How about commitment then? Is the whole institution of commitment dead?*

Dr. DD: No. Commitment is one of the most important things we have as a human species. But sometimes we enter commitments prematurely, too often driven by fear or infatuation. Then we are unable to keep our promises. It takes time to get to know yourself and the other person, and taking time before making a significant commitment is generally a very good thing to do. Sometimes you have to go through a few relationships before finding someone with whom you can form a healthy, satisfying, lasting bond.

*MW: So how do you see relationships working?*

Dr. DD: In order for a relationship to happen, both parties have to be in. If both people are drawn towards each other, then you have a relationship. If, on the other hand, one person is opting out, unfortunately there is no relationship, and the other person has no choice but to let go. Letting go can also be self-empowering. It will hurt for a while, but will make you stronger. If you stay open to the pain, you may even learn a few things about yourself in this process.

*MW: Are you painting a fairly bleak picture of relationships?*

Dr. DD: I don't think so. Statistics show that the majority of relationships are not working well, so there is no point pretending that it's all fine. I think the problem is that we live an unreasonable dream that has been fed to us through fairy tales and all sorts of other cultural programming. In real life, it does not work that way.

*MW: Are you a sceptic when it comes to love?*

Dr. DD: To the contrary. Nothing makes our lives more meaningful than love, so I am pro love. But I am also pro understanding that love requires certain conditions.

*MW: What are the conditions for love?*

Dr. DD: To name a few: patience, wisdom, tolerance for difficult emotions, and absolute respect for the other. This means, among other things, that if someone is withdrawing from you, you must honour his/her desire to move away. Through such a gesture, you show respect towards yourself as an autonomous being, and you grow in strength. And guess what? As you grow more independent and strong, you become more desirable. People are attracted to you, because people are attracted to strength.

*MW: I have a sense that we could go on forever like this.*

Dr. DD: Sure. Relationships are complex, so there is plenty to talk about. Our discussion has barely scratched the surface of it all.

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