

## Why is a spontaneous act of kindness more meaningful than a planned act?

Trick question! It isn't. Perhaps I should have chosen for this month's question "why do people *assume* that a spontaneous act of kindness is more meaningful than a planned act?" for indeed they do. Disappointed wives, husbands, boyfriends and girlfriends often express disappointment that the object of their love doesn't do what they want. When I enquire whether they have asked for what they want, they wail "but if s/he really loved me, s/he would know!" This is to confuse love with mind reading.

Perhaps the confusion stems from that primary romance: the one with our first caretakers, our mother and father. They loved us, and to our infantile perception it must often have seemed that they knew what we wanted, but then it wasn't that hard to guess, because back then our wants were simple. We wanted to eat, drink, sleep, be hugged, and have our nappies changed. Adult needs are rather less predictable.

So often, we fall in love with our partners because they *seem* so different from us, and then spend the rest of the relationship blaming them because they are.

That those who love us often fail to anticipate our needs, or even understand them, merely illustrates the obvious: that they have a separate and independent existence to our own. This means that we have to say what we want.

Asking for what we want involves taking responsibility for seeing that our own needs are met. It means being explicit and making overt the reciprocal nature of adult relationships. If we ask for what we want we make ourselves beholden and give tacit permission for the other person to make requests of us.

Asking for what we want requires courage and trust. Having expressed need or desire, there is the possibility that the other person may not respond as we wish. Safer then for people who are mistrustful, who have a low opinion of others or themselves to avoid risking disappointment and to tell themselves instead "if I have to ask for it, it's not worth having!"

In truth, a positive, planned response to a clear request denotes care every bit as much as a spontaneous act. The care is in the commission not the apprehension.

If we don't ask for what we want we reduce the chances of being satisfied and we deprive those who care for us of an opportunity to manifest their care.

Is there something you are not asking for from someone you love?

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Comments and feedback on this article are warmly welcomed.