

## Sex, Ego and better living through Louis Vuitton

If you're a fan of *Sex in the City* and haven't seen it yet, what are you thinking? Go already! Don't pass go. Don't collect \$200.00. Get your butt into a comfy stadium seating theatre and get lost in the new millennium's best soap opera. I spent a recent rainy Saturday afternoon watching *Sex in the City* with my girlfriend and was totally enchanted to reconnect to the enduring and endearing friendship between Carrie, Miranda, Samantha and Charlotte. While the movie feels more like watching a 140 minute marathon of the HBO series than a stand alone movie, it's well worth watching because its condensed nature highlights some essential lessons about the human condition and how we create our own suffering. *Sex in the City* grapples with the role that expectations and ego play in creating our unhappiness and promotes compassion and forgiveness as cures to this self-created misery.

Expectations have long been targeted as a source of misery. I remember hearing a modern day translation of a Rumi poem that basically says, "Don't be angry at the flat tire because it is not the problem. It was your expectation that the tire would stay perfectly inflated that was the problem. The nature of tires is that they go flat." *Sex in the City* provides a similar message about the impact of expectations on relationships. When Carrie reads *Cinderella* to Charlotte's daughter, she recognizes her longing for Prince Charming and corrects the "you'll meet a prince and live happily every after" expectation with, "You know, things don't always happen like this in real life." Miranda and Samantha also face their versions of Cinderella inspired expectations: Miranda comes face to face with her belief in, "till death do you part fidelity" in the presence of emotional and physical neglect, while Samantha faces her more sexualized expectation that dedicating her life to boy toy Smith Jared, will bring fulfillment. She and her growing belly also show the limitations of substituting food for sex and/or love, and more importantly, on basing one's happiness on someone else. They all learn the limitations of those fantasies. Samantha sums it up with the pithy observation that life isn't a box of Godiva chocolates: "Relationships aren't always about being happy."

More recently, I've been reading Eckhart Tolle's, *A New Earth* (the must read personal growth book recently embraced by Oprah). A follow up to, *The Power of Now, A New Earth*, focuses on how "Ego" ("the voice in the head that pretends to be you") causes mental suffering. OK, I'll admit that it's a stretch to relate Eckhart Tolle to *Sex in the City*, but stay with me for the next few paragraphs. Sure, *Sex in the City* does not address the limitations of basing one's identity on things and designer labels (Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte are total material girls -- Luis Vuitton practically co-stars and Chanel and von Furstenburg get prominent product placement billing) but it does tackle the issue of "Ego" as it relates to attachment, resentment, and a preference for making someone else pay for one's own unhappiness, even at one's own expense. Charlotte, for example, demonstrates the limitations of attachment when she almost has a fear related meltdown because she's afraid that running, which she clearly loves to do, will cause some disaster to happen to the precious, unexpected fetus. Miranda drives herself into misery by her desire to punish her husband Steve for his fall into infidelity. It turns out that Miranda's ego-driven attachment to her rage not only affects her, her husband, and her son, it also hurts Carrie in ways she never dreamed would be possible. Carrie also gets lost in ego-driven revenge when her beau, Big, freaks out. (Go watch the movie to get the rest of the story!)

Only with compassion and acknowledgement of their own part in the mess they made in their relationships do Miranda and Carrie regain their contentment. Miranda sort of does this by acknowledging that her own workaholic patterns and physical and emotional distance might have impacted Steve. (Just in case Miranda missed it, Samantha bluntly points this out in the bathing suit scene by pool.) However, it's not until the proverbial shoe is on the other foot and Carrie refuses to

accept her apology for venting to Big about the hopelessness of marriage that Miranda begins to understand Steve's plight and come to a place of forgiveness. Carrie's insight comes from looking at the mirror of her wedding plan behavior in the Vogue magazine article focusing on her upcoming wedding. When she finally realizes that her ego pushed her to focus on the attention, the designer labels, and the image rather than on her and Big, and looks at the situation from his point of view, her resentment craters.

True to a post-modern version of *Cinderella*, however, what ultimately brings Carrie and Big back together is Carrie's attachment to a pair of designer shoes. Tolle's plan for awakening to life's purpose apparently takes more than 140 minutes of screen time. Still, *Sex in the City* challenges all of us to look more carefully at our own responsibility in creating our misery and reminds us that compassion and forgiveness bring a lot more contentment than the satisfaction of "being right."

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