

## Don't Go Breakin' My Heart

It's 6:00 in the morning and I can't get the lyrics, "don't go breakin' my heart..." out of my head. What a way to start the day. I make a cup of tea in the hopes that the magical ingredients in Celestial Seasons Tummy Mint Tea will clear my brainwaves and offer solace to my broken heart. As I climb the stairs to my office, Beatles lyrics cue up in my brain. I steep my tea to a medley that starts with, "Something in the way she moves, attracts me like no other lover; something in the way she woos me. I don't want to leave her now." As I turn on my computer, the track changes to: "You say yes. I say no. You say stop and I say go go go. Oh nooooo. You say goodbye and I say hello. Hello, hello. I don't know why you say good bye I say hello." This pushes me into a blue mood and, "I'm a loser. I'm a loser. And I lost someone who's near to me..." echoes around the chambers of my brain, followed in quick succession by: "and I love her," "Yesterday. All my troubles seemed so far away," and "We can work it out." The little hamster in charge of the jukebox seems to like the last one and starts it at the beginning. "Try to see it my way, do I have to keep on talking till I can't go on? If I see it your way, run the risk of knowing that our love may soon be gone. We can work it out. We can work it out..." If I could figure out where in my brain the damned jukebox is plugged in, I'd pull the plug or at least throw a shoe at the hamster to scare him or her away from the selection buttons.

To steal a line from The Clash, I'm struggling with the question, "Should I stay or should I go." I'm angry and part of me wants to walk away from the relationship and pretend like the last 10 years never happened. As I think about walking away, the hamster cues up "Don't tell my heart, my achy breaky heart. I just don't think it understands." That song alone is enough to override the anger, if only to get that song off my brainwaves. Still, I manage to override the jukebox. When I imagine my future without her, I feel like I'm walking out of the bomb shelter to a post-nuclear apocalypse world that is bleak, lonely, and dead. Sunshine only exposes the destruction left in the bomb's wake. In revenge for my coup, the hamster plays "pray for the dead and the dead will pray for you. That's what they say but it isn't always true."

I somehow stop the music and clear the apocalyptic image by shaking my head, but this seems to cue up my desire to see her. My desire is doing it's best to convince me that if I see her and hold her in my arms, the pain will subside and everything will be beautiful. Driven by this fantasy, I try to call her. Of course she's not answering the phone and the hamster plays, "When I call you up, your line's engaged.... And I will lose my mind, if you won't see me...." I am starting to think that I really am losing my mind.

I shake my head again in the hopes that I can shake loose some semblance of sanity, but my desire to talk to her burns like an obsession in my brain. I try to convince myself that I don't care. I even commandeer the jukebox in my head to play "She thinks I still care" by George Jones. "Just because I ask a friend about her, just because I spoke her name somewhere, just because I rang her number by mistake today, she thinks I still care." I even force myself to sing the lyrics out loud, but it's not working. If I were as drunk as George probably was when he sang the song I might have better luck convincing myself that I really don't care. Unfortunately, herbal tea doesn't work like bourbon. My heart is broken and I do care.

On the upside, the jukebox must have burned a fuse when I tried to force it to play George Jones. In the silence the word "breathe" reverberates through the chambers of my brain. This is probably the only sensible idea that I've had all morning. So I take deep breath, focus on the air as it comes into my nose, watch it as it travels into my lungs and expands my belly and then

follow it as it goes out. As I continue to breathe, my head clears. I still notice the pain and the anger, but they are now background noise. In the foreground, I feel alive. For the first time in days, I feel OK. Now I can look at my broken heart with a little distance.

My partner and I had a fight. I felt hurt, got angry, said less than kind words and stormed out. She felt hurt by my words and actions and retreated into her own world of pain. I expected her to apologize first and she apparently felt the same way and we entered into a “cold war” brought about by miscommunication and assumptions. From this distance, the fight seems stupid. The specifics don’t matter. Like most fights that couples have, the 3 underlying issues are: respect, trust and safety. The fact that we are fighting a cold war only makes the problem worse. I felt disrespected by her behavior. I feel even less respected by her silence. I also don’t feel like I can trust her to honestly and openly communicate with me therefore don’t feel emotionally safe. She no doubt feels the same way.

Obviously this has been too much silence because lyric snippets from the Beatles’ “I’m a loser” are now spinning through my brain. The hamster seems to really like this bit, “And so it’s true – pride comes before a fall. I’m telling you so that you won’t lose all.” Next time you have a misunderstanding with your partner, try focusing on your breath for a few moments rather than your anger. At a minimum, this will help slow down the thoughts that are racing through your brain and might help you create distance between your mind and your feelings. Once you get to a place of objective emotional distance, list the assumptions that you have made and the way these assumptions helped set you up for your distress. Perhaps you can make a mental note to try to communicate more clearly with your partner in the future. In the meantime, explore the deeper issues: How did the behavior in question affect the extent to which you feel respected by your partner, how safe you feel with him or her and how much you trust them (and vice versa)? Is the damage based on objective reality (i.e. your partner intentionally hurt you either physically or emotionally)? Or is it based on your subjective reality (i.e. you feel hurt because you made assumptions about the meaning of your partner’s behavior – you assume that since your partner came home late that you don’t matter to him or her)? If the damage is based on subjective reality, it’s a good idea to find someone who will call you on making shit up about the meaning of your partner’s behavior and focus you instead on your partner’s actual observable behavior. If the damage is based on intent on your partner’s part, call your local domestic violence hotline or the national number at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TTY 1-800-787-3224 and talk to someone who can listen and help you make decisions about what you need to do in order to keep safe. With any luck, you won’t end up like me, stuck listening to “don’t go breakin’ my heart...” and other heartbreak songs in your head the next day.

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