

When the Honeymoon is Over

Relationships often start out feeling like fireworks on the Fourth of July. Life seems beautiful and exciting. Everything the other person does is wonderful. We feel electric currents flow through our systems when we and our new flame touch. The juke box in our brain gets stuck on love songs and we find ourselves singing lyrics like, “I want to be your girl friend. I want to be your new love. I want to be the one that you can’t get enough of.” (Mary Chapin Carpenter). Or “I want to hold your hand.” (Beatles) And though we’re loathe to admit it, most of us slip right into the fantasy that perhaps, “this is ‘the’ one, the magical other who will understand me, meet all of my needs and help me repair my emotional wounds.”

Just like the darkness hides the unsightly trash left by the revelers and casings from the exploded fireworks, our dreams work like a pair of rose colored glasses to hide the less desirable characteristics of the latest Mr. or Ms. Wonderful. However, without fail, the sun comes up on July 5th and the debris is obvious. Likewise, eventually, the rose tint fades from our glasses. We wake up to the real person behind the fantasy. We start to notice aspects about them that we don’t like. We feel irritated because they leave their dishes in the sink, for weeks and either don’t own a vacuum cleaner or don’t know how to use it, or because they are compulsive neat freaks and even alphabetize their herbal tea collection. Or maybe it’s the fact that they call 15 times a day and freak out if we don’t pick up or at least call back within the hour or because they rarely return phone calls at all. Or maybe, we feel hurt when they call from work, night after night, telling us that they just have to finish this last one thing and again arrive an hour or two after they promised they’d drop by, or frustrated when we realize that they have pretty much settled onto the couch in front of our TV and have no intention of getting a job. This is also the time we start to trip over each other’s emotional baggage and bump into the walls that they put up to keep from being vulnerable. We get a glimpse of their fears and insecurities and inadvertently set off their triggers.

It sucks to surrender to our fantasy of living happily ever after only to have it shattered by reality when the honeymoon is over. Most of us, at least at first, place the blame for our discomfort on our partners. Everything would be fine, we think, if only they would be who we wanted them to be. How dare they not live up to our expectations. It’s easy to get so focused on our partner’s limitations that we throw in the towel. And this is always an option. Another option is to see our frustration and disillusionment as an opportunity to look within and heal, either on our own, or with our partners.

Even if ultimately we chose to throw in the towel, it’s important to look at and take responsibility for our dreams and expectations. At a minimum, it’s important to look at what attracted us who we thought was Mr. or Ms. Wonderful. Was the attraction based on their abs and gluts? Was it based on the fact that they seemed like a walking party? Or that they looked incredibly successful? Or that they seemed really smart? Or that they were a great musician? Or that they exuded a sense of confidence? Or...? Very often what we are really attracted to is a mix of who the other person really is and who we want them to be. For example, we fall for a musician or a writer because we love their creativity, but get cranky when we realize that they are unable or unwilling to don a suit and get a professional job when the bills come due. Or we fall for someone who laughs a lot and is really fun to hang out with and feel betrayed when we find out that those jokes are masking worlds of pain. When this happens, it’s important to get really honest with ourselves and acknowledge the

fact that it's not the other person who's the problem. They are just being who they are. It's our expectations of who we wanted them to be relative to who they really are that's causing our misery.

This is the make or break point in the relationship. There are a lot of patterns that are simply not worth tolerating. Perhaps you finally realize that they are married or otherwise in a committed relationship that they are simply not willing to leave at this point. Perhaps your, "This is abusive behavior" alarm has been going off. Or perhaps you've started to notice that every time you get together, they are drinking and most of your evenings end with them getting shitfaced and when you confront them on it, they blow you off. Even if you decide to call it quits, it's important to look at yourself and figure out what was going on for you that you got involved with someone who wasn't really available, or who was abusive, or was taking the "better living through chemistry" approach to life. Were you attracted to someone who wasn't really available because you're not really ready to open your heart in trust and love? Did you fall for someone who is somewhat abusive because you don't really think you're worth loving or because you are comfortable with people putting you down? Did you fall for a drinker because you also have a drinking problem, or struggle with codependency? Dealing with the underlying draws to an unhealthy relationship can help you heal yourself so that the next relationship you land in will be more nurturing and fulfilling.

For couples that weren't doomed from the start because of addiction or abuse issues, the end of the honeymoon period marks the beginning of a deeper and richer relationship. We start this journey with others as kids when we play the "If you show me yours, I'll show you mine" game. Only now, it's our hearts and souls that we're putting on the line. This is scary because the chance of rejection is huge. The important thing to remember is that rejection isn't all about us, it's about their fears and limitations too. For example, if I meet my partner's friends or family and, in my anxiety, develop a serious case of diarrhea of the mouth and my partner feels humiliated, that humiliation is her stuff. Sure, I need to work on my self presentation so as not to act in a way that doesn't feel comfortable, but I don't have to own her humiliation. And the beauty is that if I tell my partner, "When I get anxious, I talk, a lot, and when I'm with people who I sense are judging me or pushing me to be someone I'm not, I get really nervous," together, we might be able to devise a strategy to deal with my anxiety. We might, for example, avoid office parties where I would be expected to act like a Fortune 500 professional and family functions where arguing religious doctrine wouldn't go over well. It's only by risking getting emotionally naked with someone that you can actually truly let in the love they feel for you. And if that love's not there, well, isn't it better to know now and move on?

The other side of the risk of showing your vulnerability is the reward of feeling accepted and safe to be who you really are. You can't really get to this place without really letting someone else in. And, while the woo-hoo thrill of the electrical currents that flow through you when you first meet someone are fabulous, that's nothing compared to the electricity that can surge through you when you hit a place of comfortable intimacy with someone you love. It's actually only through the process of tearing down your emotional walls that you can experience the mind blowing cosmic possibilities of physical intimacy. So at some level, the end of the honeymoon is the beginning of something deeper, richer and more exciting than the fireworks you feel on the fourth of July, if you're willing to do the work to get there.

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