

Intimacy is Always There

What, ultimately, could be at the bottom of heartbreak? Although it is always so unique and personal, why does it seem to hit those who suffer it in largely the same way? It has a particular flavor. Although we may react differently on the surface—some become enraged and go off like loose cannons, some fall into a stiff, despairing depression, while others go numb and allow themselves to die a little on the inside—underneath these responses is something in common. What you feel when love is lost, though akin to other losses, is different than what you feel when a loved one dies, or your house burns down, or you find out that you are ill. Obviously, these are all profound losses, among the worst you can experience. And, as when your heart is broken, certain things seem to arise in common: denial, anger, grief, and so on. But there is something else involved in heartbreak and I believe that this something else is what makes it both so devastating and, at the same time, a profound path to wisdom. What we have lost reveals our most hidden and potent longing: to be fully and thoroughly met.

To be met obviously doesn't mean in the "how are you, nice to meet you" sense. Instead, it means something so deep. It means that the totality of who you are is received into the being of another, causing that other to open his arms to you and extend the perfect shelter of sacred acceptance. It is sacred in that it is unconditioned. It ignores faults and assets alike and reaches through them to simply hold *you*. One fully comes into existence by such an embrace. It is what we all long for and this longing animates us in motion and in stillness, awake and asleep, in a relationship or not. It is intrinsic and very mysterious.

Almost every night, I have the same dream. In the course of doing something mundane like going to a meeting or sitting on an airplane, I meet a stranger and a feeling of mutual rapture suddenly arises. There is an overwhelming wish to touch and be touched. It is a magnetic pull that suddenly shrinks the entire world into one-pointed focus: the possibility, never quite realized, of bliss. I have had this dream all my adult life, and in recent years, it truly is an almost nightly occurrence. I have no idea what it means, really. I wake up next to my husband and sneak into his arms, whether to approximate the bliss-embrace or brush it away as unreal, I don't know. To lie in his arms is my greatest pleasure, but it is not the same. The desire to be in that precise moment of potentially magnetic and pure connection to another, over and over, is, apparently, hardwired. At least for me.

When it comes to losing love, it is losing the possibility of this moment that causes such powerful suffering. When you think about what you have lost, it is likely not the funny jokes you shared that you long for, but the moment when your minds met to see the humor together. It is probably not the fun evenings out at your favorite club that you miss, but the sense of special, unspoken alignment with this other person, the two of you bound by an unseen link, made even more precious amidst the chaos of crowds and loud music. And it probably isn't even the future with the house and the vacations and the cozy gatherings with friends that you grieve, but the sense of going forward with another into the future, shoulder to shoulder, creating one world together. It is that feeling of being met and accompanied right here, right now, and into the foreseeable future, which is what we hunger for. We'll compromise a lot to hold onto this promise.

I can prove it to you that it's not your ex that you are missing so much, but the possibility of sacred connection you sensed with him. I can totally prove it. No matter how special, wonderful, one-of-a-kind superior this lost man is, *the moment you feel the possibility of this connection with another, the person you now miss will disappear entirely from your consciousness*. Really. All the super-specific yearnings you now experience—for the smell of his neck, the particular rumble in his voice, his sleepy face in the morning—will simply dissolve. As if they had never been there. You may not believe me right now, but it's true. And at some point in the future, you will look back and go, "I felt those things about *him*? I'm not saying you won't retain a melancholic and legitimately grievous sense of loss, but it will be nostalgia, not a present longing. Because what you are missing is not him. What you are missing is the super-powerful and utterly genuine thrill of intimacy. And rightly so. It is something to be longed for, cherished, and, certainly, grieved when it is lost.

But here's the thing. The person who you lost does not hold the key to this sense of connection. Even if you were to spend the next forty years with him, that thing that you actually long for would not be found, except in very special moments. I mean, look at the reality of your relationship. When you were together, did you feel this special connection every moment? Of course not. You likely saw his good and bad points, and when the amazing moments of communion came along, they left you enraptured and then you noticed that he needed a haircut or remembered that you had to do some laundry. That's how life is. But somehow when your heart is broken, all you remember are the rapturous moments. I know that sometimes people think it will help you to heal if you retrospectively catalogue those moments as bogus, but I don't think so, because they

were real. And now they're gone. The nutty thing is, that even if you were still together, this would still be true.

Instead of (or in addition to) crying all the time because of how much you miss the sense of being connected to another, if you look around, you can see that such moments of intimacy are occurring all the time. Okay, okay, so they don't (usually) involve happily taking your clothes off, but still, they're quite lovely, profound, and, if you pay attention, satisfying. They happen when you're standing in line at the market and you catch another customer's eyes to grin at an overheard conversation. When you're reading a book and suddenly one line jumps out as if it was speaking directly and only to you. Or when you're listening to music and a certain tone or chord progression seems to mirror your state of soul exactly. When you meet a friend for lunch and see that she understands exactly what you are feeling and your hearts open together into a state of closeness. Sure these moments may leave you wishing for more when they are gone, but that's how life goes. They're never permanent. It's actually quite freeing to realize that.

Just now, writing that last sentence, a lovely warm breeze blew across my back as I sit on a settee by an open window in the Colorado Rockies. It's early on a July morning and I'm all alone. I'm wearing a thin nightgown, which leaves most of my back bare and I have a blanket around my legs to provide just enough warmth against the cool mountain air. The way the breeze touched my back was so private, it was like the sky itself reached down to touch me, only me. It took me by surprise, just like in my dreams. The world is always trying to touch you in this way.

Intimacy is always there. You just have to look. I'll have to remember to tell this to my dream boyfriend the next time I see him.