

Why are broken relationships so exhausting?

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If you talk to anyone going through a divorce or whose marriage is headed that way the one thing they all have in common is an overwhelming sense of fatigue, hopelessness and just wanting it all to end. The reasons for that are fairly obvious. If you didn't care, if it was trivial, it would never weigh upon you. But on the contrary, a marriage is something you've invested your whole mind, heart and soul into. You had big dreams about it, longed for it and finally found a person who loved you back and wanted to share your life with you. Then things got harder, but you were willing to make sacrifices. You probably even went way beyond any concept of "fair share", making *heroic* efforts to salvage the relationship, and you've endured a lot of suffering by the time it's now really coming to an end. Of course that's tiring!

If I can paint a silly analogy, that doesn't even come close to capturing what you've suffered, it will still be helpful for the discussion below.

Imagine that you're not crazy about hiking but a good friend convinces you to climb Half Dome in Yosemite National Park, or the Grand Canyon (both are quite challenging). These are some stages you might go through unless you're an experienced climbing enthusiast:

1. Initial arrival before climbing – can be full of awe, excitement about the challenge, some fear, but happy to be there with your friend. Intellectually you know there will be good parts and bad parts, and you set off hoping for the best.
2. As you start hiking you might admire the landscape, the variety of foliage and terrain and the exercise. It all feels normal, and you're not the only ones on the trail.
3. As you become tired you can keep yourself going out of a desire to finish what you started, to not be a quitter, and to keep up or lead for the sake of your friend. Plus you're curious about what it feels like at the peak. Everyone says it's amazing.
4. Soon you might not even care much about the views or any of the "positive" reasons you undertook the hike. Physical ailments might start to dominate. Pain in your legs, or stomach, or headaches and nausea from the rising altitude. It starts to become about making the most of a situation you'd rather not be in.
5. When you reach the peak you might feel a little re-charged, or you might already be worried about the effort and time it will require to get back down safely. You might even be disappointed, asking, "Is this all there is? Why do people make a big deal about this?" Or even, "Why do we do this to ourselves? How am I going to get down?"
6. During the descent you might be happy to be headed back but you might also be a little worried about having enough energy to finish (not to mention food and water). It becomes more about survival. And the sun is going down faster than you thought... *This is even worse if you're in the Grand Canyon, which means you're going uphill to get out.*
7. Soon you're telling yourself that you'll never do this again, while trying to maintain a cheerful demeanor for the sake of your friend, though comments are starting to slip out.
8. Many times you think you're reaching the end, the final stretch, that things are going to change, the worst is over, just one more bend... only to realize you're wrong! You

wonder just how much farther it really is and the exhaustion is just building on you. You take a deep breath, keep your head down and continue marching.

9. And all this is assuming your friend isn't irritating you the whole way. If they're oblivious to what you're going through, or they're having a good time or think things are fine then you're even more angry and frustrated.

10. By the time you reach the bottom, you firmly declare that you will never, ever do that again. Depending on how quiet you were on the path, this may come as a total surprise to your partner.

Unfortunately, ending a marriage is not nearly as simple as ending a hike or never climbing a mountain again. The mountain of divorce comes with you, and you aren't quite able to get rid of it for YEARS, especially if there are kids involved. And no amount of crying and thrashing about will change that. You are just chained to this thing.

Part of the agony is the sense that you just can't win. You start to wonder what's wrong with you and why God must have it out for you. Like you've been condemned for some little thing you did that should have never been that big a deal. So your mind is not only spinning with trying to fix daily realities, you're also doing a lot of mental and emotional work to figure out how you got here and whether you're crazy or not... and not getting any answers so that's exhausting too. (Far more than trivial physical things like climbing mountains.)

WHERE TO LOOK FOR REST

With all that going on in your mind, the last thing you're up for is going on *another hike with that idiot!* And you certainly don't believe that they can cease to be an idiot and really connect with you in a way they never have before. Even if that miracle could happen, you don't even desire it any more. You just want to be as far as you possibly can from them. The wounds are so deep, the pain is so real, and you just want to breathe! And rest! And wake up to a new life without any of that suffering. Is that too much to ask?

But realistically, if your partner had fallen off a cliff during that hike, would that have alleviated all your anger, bitterness and loneliness?

You probably say, "Yes!" But the reality is that you would still carry so much of that past with you. And your next relationship would be contaminated by it.

Air needs to flow. So does blood, and water. It does no good to block them up. If your partner had really been with you on that hike, emotionally connected, if you hadn't suffered alone so much, it would have been a completely different experience. It would be something you'd both look back on and laugh about – together. It would have brought you closer, not further apart.

This is why I focus on communication – but I wish there was a better word that people realized they didn't understand. When communication doesn't flow, when people don't

have the words or skills to keep a very open, breezy, fresh life together, then stagnation comes. Bacteria builds. Frustration happens. Poor communication takes on its own destructive cycle which neither side intended, recognized or knew what to do about. The answers are not at all obvious and that frustration itself is exhausting because the mind never stops working.

Your spouse may be “clueless” right now, but you have a lot to gain by getting educated together on how to better communicate. It might seem easier to get rid of them, but that will not cure the exhaustion and pain that you feel. On the contrary, the relief and connection and laughter you will experience when your partner *finally(!)* comprehends you will be irreplaceable. That is the best therapy. And the only therapy that works. You will be able to unleash a river of emotion and not have it blocked or backed up, but instead create an easy, healthy flow, full of nutrients for a community of people, called a family.

You might be exhausted right now and this might seem like pie in the sky. But is the answer really to break up, get more sleep and develop a hobby? Are you really going to feel healed by shutting out a painful person? No, you won't. Only a healthy flow of communication and understanding will bring you relief and rest and comfort you need and then rebuild the desire to love again.

Believe it or not, you can reach the person who has made your life so miserable, and only that connection will bring the kind of healing you need. And it's high time you availed yourself of it. You deserve the respect, admiration and consolation that it will bring.

Please reach out. RelationalHarmony.org was created to help people like you and our success with couples is what makes it all worthwhile. While our offices are in the DC area we're willing to come to you. www.relationaltharmony.org