

Healing a Broken Heart

Recently, I was asked, "How does one begin to heal from a painful love affair?"

Oh, if only there were a simple answer to heartbreak. Alas, I have yet to find one. After witnessing countless women's journeys on the road to healing from a hurtful love affair, the conclusion that I've come to is that 'the only way out is through.'

This, dear reader, is probably NOT the answer you were looking for. However, I'm a big believer in dealing with reality and not seeking simple solutions to complex problems.

When a healthy intimate relationship ends, the pain can feel unbearable at times. But when a hurtful, or abusive, relationship ends, not only are you dealing with the loss of the relationship; you've also got to heal from the trauma of the abuse. I'm not sure if the relationship in question was abusive or not because I don't have enough information to go on, but for the purposes of this column, I'm going to assume that it wasn't in order to simplify things. Please forgive me if I got it wrong. If it was abusive, I strongly recommend that you seek psychotherapy with someone who specializes in healing from abuse as this is a very delicate matter that needs professional help.

So, in terms of healing from a relationship where there wasn't abuse per se, but it just didn't work due to other reasons (there can be many), I will state again that **THE ONLY WAY OUT IS THROUGH**. What I mean by that is that you have to allow yourself to go through the grieving process until you're done. There's no strict formula here for what that should look like or how long it should take, but in general, there are definite stages of grief. I've taken the following from Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' book, "On Death and Dying." In it, she outlines five stages that a dying person experiences when they are told they are dying.

The stages identified are:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Even though these stages were developed for people who are terminally ill; experience throughout the years has shown that they are equally applicable to many other forms of loss and grief. So when a relationship ends, for example, you may go into denial and scream, "this can't be happening to me!"

Soon after that, you may explode with anger and think, "Why is this happening to me?" You may blame your ex, yourself, or even God for the end of the relationship. This can be especially intense if your partner cheated on you. You may be enraged at the unfairness of it all and want to punish him/her and the person they cheated with.

Then comes the bargaining stage where you're in so much pain after the break-up, that you're willing to do anything in order to get that person back and you shriek, "I promise I'll be a better person if you'll just come back to me."

Then, you're hit with the proverbial "blues." This is when you're favourite place in your home is your freezer and you frequently go there for a tub of Haagan Dazs (and NOT the low-fat kind either!) Billie Holiday records are also extremely handy at this stage, as are countless bubble baths in which you soak your tired body, cry a river of tears (all while listening to Billie on the stereo and consuming ice cream- a sort of emotional 'multitasking', if you like).

Then, alas, the tears start to dry up, you don't feel so crumby, and you start to notice the good things in life again. This final stage, the one you've earned through going through all of the preceding stages and surviving, is called, "acceptance." This is when you pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get back on the saddle of life with a renewed sense of hope, some understanding, a dose of personal growth, and even a sense of humour. Even though I've never had children, I'm imagining that this stage is like JUST AFTER YOU'VE GIVEN BIRTH, and you almost forget how painful it all was and can see that it was all worth it.

To all of you who are trying to heal from a broken heart, I hope that at least some of what I've shared here helps.

Peace,

Esther

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Esther has over a decade of experience counselling women and their loved ones with a multitude of presenting problems. Her main focus is helping women to become free of barriers which keep them stuck so that they can become all that they dream of being.

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