

Love, relationships, and potential potholes

My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met.

—Rodney Dangerfield

Okay, seriously folks: Any corporation with a failure rate as high as today's divorce rate — right around 50 percent in the United States — would have to reexamine its internal structures and would probably go out of business. This high percentage of marital breakups is an indicator that things may be changing and evolving in human-relationship land.

Most people want to find a soul mate who will love, understand, relate, respect, and live with them happily ever after. However, few people are fortunate enough to find a true soul mate in this life. Even so, many still want to have some companionship along their paths, and so they settle for relationships that seem to be compatible and loving in the moment, but which may change into being not so compatible or loving in the future.

Due to cultural traditions, a couple may feel obliged to sign on the dotted line of vows that don't necessarily carry the full depth of their souls' conviction, such as promising to stay together "in sickness and in health, until death do us part," when these vows may not reflect their true feelings and intentions. Even if both parties are fortunate enough to stay alive and healthy, today's focus on individual growth may bring some to seek their future growth in different directions from their partners. Therefore, honesty, respect, and communication are paramount in any relationship. Don't just repeat vows you don't really mean. Either rewrite your vows or contemplate deeply to make a true commitment to keep them.

Even with all the shifts and changes that are inevitable with two intertwined lives, you can keep your relationship vibrant, strong, and ever-deepening. With mutual respect and flexibility, you and your partner can allow and support each other in following your dreams and aspirations while maintaining your connection of love and commitment. The key to keeping your vows without selling out your greater dreams is to understand and appreciate the preciousness of life and of each soul's journey in this world. Without respect for each other's growing and changing interests and inspirations, a previously promising relationship can end up crumbling into resentment, dishonesty, and anger.

Maintain good communications with your loved one about what you really commit to and how you plan to keep growing individually and together. Everyone has different beliefs and expectations when it comes to the "rules of relationships." Discuss yours with your partner so that you can both make real vows that you can honor and keep while you are together, and also if the time ever comes that you move and grow into separate directions.

A not too far-fetched scenario

A husband and wife are having dinner at a very fine restaurant, when a gorgeous young woman comes over to their table, gives the husband a big kiss on the lips, says she'll see him later, and walks away.

The wife glares at her husband and asks, "Who was that?"

"Oh," replies the husband, "she's my mistress."

"Well, that's the last straw," says the wife. "I've had enough! I want a divorce."

"I can understand that," replies her husband, "but remember, if we get a divorce it will mean no more shopping trips to Paris, no more wintering in Barbados, no more summers in Tuscany, no more Lexus in the garage, and no more yacht club. But the decision is yours."

Just then, a mutual friend enters the restaurant with a beautiful young woman on his arm.

"Who's that woman with Jim?" asks the wife.

"That's his mistress," says her husband.

"Ours is prettier," she replies.

Although this scenario is meant to be a humorous commentary on why some relationships stay together, every person can look at their own lives and situations to find ways that they may be selling out what is really important — in the case of this story, true love — for lesser comforts and materialistic benefits.

Be Careful

I would like to give a disclaimer here and say that having lived with a monastic focus during most of my life, I haven't had a lot of opportunities to personally explore too many relationships, although I have experienced my share of spiritual devotional love. So while I do my best to present helpful information about the topics of marriage and romantic relationships from a spiritual point of view, if you look very closely, you may find just a teeny-tiny bit of bias on my behalf toward opting for the single life.

Marriage is a great institution, but I'm not ready for an institution.

—Mae West