

A Messy, Miserable Relationship

Ram (James Swartz)

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Cathy: Hello, James. I am sorry to trouble you with all this relationship stuff, but I really do need help.

I am enclosing an email I have just received from John, only because I want to set the context of this email. I went to his place tonight and he “informed” me that he had rung up his ex-girlfriend after four-and-a-half years of silence from him. I walked out, upset and crying. When I later rang and asked him if he had discussed our relationship with her, he said, yes, he had. He told her we were now living separately, but were still going out together (we have made love a couple of times since I spoke to you last). So now everybody (including his ex girlfriends, as he had previously rang another one) knows all about my very private life, and I mean everybody! He rang and told everybody he knew, even though it is my life too and I hate it being advertised: now we are sleeping together, now we are just platonic friends, now we are again sleeping together!! For fuck’s sake!!

This is going to be a long email, so please bear with me.

It is true, I have made demands on him not to see other women, that is, not to go out for coffee, lunch, dinner, etc. with other women. I am possessive, jealous, insecure. It is all true. Unfortunately, I come from a culture where almost everybody fucks everybody else, and in fact you are considered an idiot if you don’t. Men proudly have lovers while they are married and now women do the same. It is a disaster. I know John comes from a very different culture where, for example, his first wife trusted him completely and he was able to go out with whomever, whenever. He was faithful until he wasn’t. Great reassurance.

Now, as you can see from his email, he wants, demands, that I accept all his “new” rules. Before, when we were “married,” I always had his password to his emails, as he had mine. Now that is denied to me. I guess now that we are not “married” anymore, I don’t have those rights. Now he demands that I accept that he can talk to, go out with and see anybody he wishes to. Intellectually, I tend to agree with him, but emotionally, that is a whole different ball game. By the way, one thing he said in his email that is not true was that he did not demand I like the people he likes, as this fact has caused lots of problems between us because I mostly don’t like the people he likes and he did want me to like them. I found his email cold, insensitive and demanding of his rights. I feel like I have been “told.” I don’t see, emotionally, how the hell I can accept his terms. He is right, demands are destructive, but what about his demands that I accept his demands? I know I have a VERY black-and-white attitude to life and people, and that is probably no good. The only person for whom I have bent my rule is John. I don’t want to lose him on one hand, but on the other, I can’t bear the fact that today he is with me and tomorrow he can’t see me because his ex is in town and he is going to have dinner with her, and the day after he can’t, because his other woman friend and he are going to catch a movie, and the day after he is going to take someone else he met at the Vedanta class to lunch.

I know what you are going to say: how fucking childish of me. I am 51 years old and full of insecurities. True, I am. Can you help me see this rightly?

Ram: Hi, Cathy. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it says, "A wise person follows his or her nature." This verse can be interpreted to mean that he or she sticks with the self or it can mean he or she does not try to become something other than what he or she is on the level of the personality. Most people are not happy with who they are in a relative sense and want to be different, but it is very difficult to change your conditioning, as you know. You can do it, but it takes many years because of the conservative nature of the *samskaras*. It is true that jealousy and possessiveness are qualities that are born of self-ignorance. They are completely dualistic and a consequence of low self-esteem.

It is also true that tying up one's happiness with the behavior of another is foolish. But this is the way you are. You look to a man to make you happy. No blame. But it seems that passion is blinding you to the facts. You are one type of person and he is another.

I do not know why you think John is so wonderful. He may be wonderful, but he is not wonderful for you. His nature and your nature are incompatible. This is why you threw him out of the house. Remember, it was your own actions that precipitated this mess. You wanted it one way then and you want it another way now. Who is to say that if you get him back you will not throw him out again when his behavior does not fit with your likes and dislikes?

Just as you cannot change your nature, he cannot change his, so if you insist on having a man, you need to find a man who has a similar nature and who follows the same rules for relationships that you do. For you, it is absolutely essential that a person be faithful. Usually, this type of man is not as interesting, exciting and sexy as John, so the woman has to sacrifice excitement and pleasure for emotional security. Remember, *samsara* is a zero-sum game; there is an upside and a downside to everything.

Even if he miraculously changed overnight for good in line with your idea of what he should be and you had your cozy little relationship, you would still not be satisfied. This is so because you want a relationship with someone else because your relationship with yourself is not satisfactory. We can leave the higher self out of it. By "self" I mean Cathy, the person you take yourself to be. What this whole business should teach you is that you are not clear about what you want, Vedanta lesson #1.

There is no freedom in *samsara*. All relationships are in *samsara*. There is joy and sorrow in them. So if you are going to seek happiness in *samsara*, you need to take the bitter with the sweet. I was lucky because I figured all this out when I was about twenty-six. I had a passionate relationship with the wrong kind of woman, like you have with John. She was not faithful. Yes, she was very fun and sexy, but I could not count on her. After that, I more or less stayed away from this kind of woman. And if I got involved with this type, I didn't really get involved. I said and did all the right things to keep the relationship interesting, but when the handwriting was on the wall I was happy to walk away. I learned how to appreciate intimacy when it was happening and freedom when intimacy was not happening. Clinging to certain feelings is foolish. If you invest your feelings appropriately – in the search for true freedom – you may suffer a bit in the short run, but you will feel good that you are taking care of your spiritual needs and you will find satisfaction in the long run.

The torment you are experiencing is good. Think *karma yoga*. It should convince you that your likes and dislikes are not a suitable foundation for happiness. If it does, a determination will arise that will take you beyond the need for a paltry human relationship.

So I see this as a referendum on what you really want. If you can't get over the idea that a man can make you happy, keep trying until you learn the lesson. Hint: John is not the right kind of guy for you. You need an accountant. ☺ Or if he is, then you need to loosen up a bit and figure out how to accept him the way he is. If he likes other women, so what? If he sleeps with other women, you can cut him off. I do not know about John, because I am not interested in his relationships with others, only in his relationship with me, which is very good, but usually this kind of freedom is actually sexual greed. They have a euphemism for it: an "open" relationship. It is born of a bored, *rajasic*, wayward mind, one that is never satisfied, one that is not content in itself, one that needs a lot of stimulation. It is a kind of hell realm, just like jealousy and possessiveness.

In fact you cannot really have your cake and eat it too in life, unless you are self-realized. And then you don't care if you have your cake – or if you eat it. When you are having it, you are happy, and when you are eating it, you are happy. Your feelings are not wrapped up in your worldly experiences; they are tied up with something greater, something that is steady.

I hope this little lecture is helpful. I would love to hold your hand and say, "There, there, you poor dear," but it is probably better to face the facts. It is not working. Let it go. Be happy.

~ Much love, James

Cathy: Dear James, I have had the best (worst) morning of my life today. I stewed in my own juices from 6:30 in the morning till about 11.00 am when John showed up. After struggling with myself all those hours and coming up with different conclusions and realisations while crying the whole time, I finally gave up. What I have been wanting from John has been security, love and comfort and he will NEVER give it to me. Why? Because he CAN'T, that's why. If he could have, he would have. So I'm giving up on the "relationship" illusion. This recent event has been a blessing in disguise. Amazing!!! I told John we can stay friends, but that is it, that I need to spend my energy in finding the truth about who I am instead of spending it in getting him to give me stuff that he can never give me anyway, that my nature is different to his and I will never (through my conditioning and upbringing) be the person he wants me to be and he will never be the person (through his conditioning and upbringing) be the person I need. In any case, I'm quite happy to be by myself anyway. It has been really freeing, this whole thing. Thank you, Ram, thank you, thank you, thank you, THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!! from the bottom of my heart.

~ All my love, Cathy

John's Letter to Cathy

Hi, Cathy. My life is mine, as your life is yours. You are free to see and talk to anybody you choose, as am I. I will under no circumstances choose to set aside that choice, because to me that would be a form of slavery. You must understand this. I will never defend or justify to you my choice concerning this. If I do something that violates what is right, that is another matter. I have always held this view, but I set it aside for your sake. This was a mistake. I am willing to be faithful to you and honest with you. But I will not EVER turn over my freedom as to who I will talk to over to you. I see this as a DEMAND which you have no right to make. I always have and I always will. This will never change. We are together as a couple. We enjoy each other's company. I may do things you don't like, but on the whole I am a good man. If you cannot live

with me liking and seeing whoever I wish without getting upset, we have a serious problem. I am not in any way demanding you like the people I like. That would be unreasonable. I think it is unfair of you to assume that I want to be unfaithful to you. I am not like that. I don't intend to live my life in the context of your unreasonable fears. I just can't do that. You are right, I want my freedom (that doesn't include doing anything wrong). I love my freedom and I don't have to justify it to you or anybody else.

We have to respect each other's right to communicate to whoever we want. I rejected Scientology on this one point. I want you to respect my right to have as friends whoever I choose. That does not mean you have to like them, as I said. This is a reaction you are having at the moment. It will pass. Think about what I have said. My only duty is not to violate *dharma*, as is yours. Think hard about this because if you want me to subject myself to your wishes on this, it is not going to happen. The idea of owning a person is wrong and it is also very destructive. I hope you will see this. I don't ever want to talk about this again.

~ Love, John

James to Cathy re John's letter

Hi, Cathy. Having said all that in the previous email, I think John's letter to you is sincere and correct. The tone is a bit severe, but it is appropriate. I think he feels that you need to know how serious he is about his freedom. I should think that you would be happy to have a man who is free of your demands. But I don't believe it is a suitable basis to trust him, not because he is insincere, but because it is not intelligent to turn over your happiness to someone else. Even if he is faithful and sincere, you will still be riddled with doubt every time he goes out with another woman because, as I said in the last email, you are doubtful about yourself and you grew up in an unhealthy culture where infidelity was more or less normal. As my ex-wife, who had the right attitude, used to say, "I don't care where you get your appetite as long as you come home for dinner." Just because men look at other women does not mean that they are dishonest.

As I said before, if you expect a relationship to make you happy, you will suffer, irrespective of your partner's nature. If you are happy in yourself, you can enjoy any relationship. The conclusion: be happy as you are and take John with a grain of salt. As Krishna says in the *Gita*, "Every being follows his or her nature; what use is control?"

~ Love, James