

Life Chronicles

By Rachel Bluth



Dear Mrs. Bluth,

Many years ago, when I was going through a terrible situation, I wrote to you and your input, advice and resources helped me and convinced my husband to give me a get. Although this saved us from further abuses, I did not get the psychological counseling you had recommended and, as a result, my daughter was emotionally damaged. Unfortunately, she married a man very much like her father. She had been warned about his anger issues and I did voice my objections when they were dating, but to no avail. She insisted we were all wrong. She was clearly infatuated with him and insisted that he was very caring and respectful to her. In the end, there was nothing I could do but give in and allow her to marry him, although I did so with a heavy heart.

It didn't take long before he struck her because she got pregnant when he had told her they should not have children for the first two or three years. My daughter called me from behind a locked bedroom door, terrified and not knowing what to do. I rushed to her apartment and rang her bell. She opened the door and greeted me with a swollen eye and bruised cheek still red from the blow and, as her husband stood behind her smiling, said all was resolved and I shouldn't worry; she would call me in

the morning. She called the next day, as promised, but each time I alluded to the previous night's incident, she veered away from the subject and said everything was resolved, he had apologized and promised it would never happen again. But of course it did, many times over. There were many other incidents of physical and emotional abuse, but she wouldn't hear of leaving him.

Fast forward fourteen years and five children later. My daughter and her kids have moved in with me. Her husband has disappeared, after cleaning out their accounts and leaving her with a mountain of debts and no health insurance. While I have reached out to their creditors and the schools to ensure that payments are made, my greatest worry is for my two oldest grandchildren who bore a great deal of the abuse from their father. The eldest child, a girl, is grossly underweight and I have seen deep scratch marks on her upper arms and legs. It took some time, but she did confide in me that her father had called her all sorts of names – ugly, fat, pig and the like – and that she throws up after she eats even the tiniest bit of food.

The second, a boy, has behavioral issues. He strikes out at anyone within arms' reach, throws objects and screams at the top of his lungs until he is spent. There is little I can do for him as he does not

let me near him. He blames my daughter and me for having sent his father away, even though his father beat him mercilessly with a belt, broom stick, or whatever else was at hand.

Mrs. Bluth, I am trying so hard to keep my family together, but the work is never-ending, the pain and damage is everywhere, and I am so tired. I have gone back to work to be able to support my daughter's and grandchildren's physical needs, but emotionally I'm ill equipped. Please tell me what to do; this time, I will listen.

Dear Friend,

You are carrying a burden far too great for one person. That you are physically, mentally and emotionally spent is no mystery. So take heart and know that there are many wonderful people ready to help your daughter and her children. You have enough on your plate trying to keep your family financially afloat.

The first thing you need to address is the mental health of the two oldest children who are clearly in need of psychological or psychiatric attention immediately. You would be wise to arrange therapy for the three younger ones as well; they will most surely benefit from unlearning the negative and destructive behavior they have been exposed to. The same holds true for your daughter, who must deal with the abuse she experienced at both her father and husband's hands. Dysfunction left untreated begets more dysfunction. This may be a lengthy process, but well worth it for the wellbeing of your family.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me for any help you need and I will try to put you in touch with the proper individuals best able to assist you. May Hakodosh Boruch Hu give you the strength to persevere and lead your children and grandchildren to a place of peace and good health and may you see much *nachas*, joy and happiness.

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Cutting Through The Fog Of Infatuation

By Sarah N. Pachter

Imagine the following scene:

Walking down the streets of New York City one evening, you pass by a quaint restaurant. Seated inside, just up against a window, a couple shares a romantic candlelit dinner. As you continue walking, you can't help but look back at the woman laughing and tossing her perfect hair over her shoulders. There appears to be a glow between this couple, and inwardly you long for the feeling they seem to share.

Watching them can make one aware of an internal void, often perceived as a longing. What is it that this couple has that makes them appear so happy? Is this feeling infatuation? Love? Is there even a difference between these two feelings?

Infatuation often creates a fog that is extremely hard to see through. Most humans have experienced typical signs of infatuation – like a temporary butterfly-feeling – but infatuation is very clever at hiding itself.

Three of the most powerful and eye opening characteristics of infatuation are:

1. Infatuation is imagination based. You can be attracted to anyone. John is unhappy in his marriage and has started connecting online with Marilyn. They have a great cyber-based bond and John always laughs at their conversations. John is so happy at the idea of this new relationship that he does not even bother having long conversations with his wife anymore. He knows that he will later repeat anything new and exciting to Marilyn via computer. Eventually, Marilyn sends John a letter with pictures of herself in the mail as they plan to meet. John holds off on opening his letter.

Later, his wife insists that they go to therapy due to their diminishing relationship. After John reluctantly accompanies his wife, he privately shares with the therapist that he has an unopened envelope from Marilyn. The therapist suggested that he give it six months. If, after all that time, he still wishes to leave his wife, he could pursue this new relationship.

John followed the therapist's advice and waited six months. He solved the issues with his wife and felt happy with his renewed relationship. Years later, while cleaning out his closet he stumbled upon the unopened envelope. He opened it up and stared at the photo of Marilyn. An 84-year-old woman with silver hair stared back at him. A post-it note attached to the picture read: "I guess we weren't meant to be together in this lifetime, John" (as heard from Gary Newman).

One of the many lessons that can be gleaned from this story is that our minds can take control of situations and create images of people that are not accurate. We fool ourselves into seeing who we want to see. The result is a reconstruction of this other person. When we imagine in this way, we are really constructing it for ourselves. Which leads us to...

2. Infatuation is incredibly selfish. Have you ever had a daydream about an ex or someone you are infatuated with? When we relive an experience we often see ourselves in our mind's eye, almost in a bird's eye view. When you think about this person, you are really thinking about your own needs and desires. In a strange way, infatuation is an obsession not only with the other person but with yourself as well. When under the spell of infatuation, ask yourself if your imagination is taking over and if this infatuation is just about you. If you can be truly honest with yourself, you have taken the first step to breaking the fog

of infatuation.

3. Infatuation is very short-term; it can be passionate and dreamy, fully taking over one's mind with excitement. It can prevent us from working and concentrating on everyday life, but this feeling does not last forever – often about 6-18 months. Perhaps this fleeting infatuation is to blame for the high numbers of recent divorce rates.

To have a long-lasting relationship that is sparked by infatuation, one must go through these stages: Infatuation; The "Annoying Fork Stage"; Everlasting Love.

After the infatuated butterflies and passionate exchanges comes "Annoying Fork Stage" which is a euphemism for difficult relationship dramas. If you can weather these mini-storms and continue to connect, share, and care for one another, you end up reaching an elevated state of real love. It is often after conquering a challenge that true love develops, as limits are stretched to their max. Most of society gives up at the start of the "Annoying Fork Stage" and never allows themselves to cross the bridge and experience true love. People sell themselves short because they think, "It's just not the same anymore" and give up all hope for eternal love.

Infatuation leads us to another question: Can everlasting love be developed from infatuation? Looking at how infatuation hides itself can actually guide us to what love really is – something based on reality and not imagination. Love is also based on selflessness. When you expand yourself, you are testing your own limits, thus making yourself a better person.

How is this different from selfish infatuation? Isn't giving to others in order to make ourselves greater a selfish pursuit?

Giving to others is expansive and creates room for another person to enter our lives. Infatuation that does not lead to love is a selfish pursuit that makes us smaller and leaves no room for others. This ex-

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