

Since divorcing my wife and coming out five years ago, I have had a string of short-term relationships. With each relationship, I string another pearl.

Most of these relationships last only months, and some of the breakups are painful. Sometimes pain best drives the point home.

Through these seemingly insignificant relationships, I am learning more about myself and how I lose myself in relationships. Not anchored, I am swept away by another's emotions, opinions or moods.

I lose my power. I am learning when I lose my power I short-circuit any chance of a meaningful relationship.

I become resentful. These power outages generate anger, mostly with myself.

I have heard that anger is based on unmet needs. Not addressing my needs is one way I lose my power, and losing myself is a key reason my relationships break up.

The longest I ever dated a man was nine months. I had hoped to create a relationship of equals, yet I was not grounded enough in my own identity to withstand his strength.

I did not hold true to my values. Fearing his judgment, I could not express my true feelings, needs and desires.

For him, I took up tennis, although I did not enjoy it. As a couple, we did all the things he loved and too seldom the activities I enjoyed.

Trying to appear perfect, I edited my conversation. I was reluctant to share all my beliefs about religion and relationships for

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Short-circuiting relationships

fear he would not approve.

I was afraid of losing him. I was fearful of being abandoned.

At the root of my fears was the fear of being alone. I felt I had to change to keep him.

"If only I was buffer, blonder, smoother, smarter or richer," I thought. "If only, if only, I was enough."

By even contemplating changing, I was not being true to myself. Not in touch with my true self, I lost my footing.

I became untethered. My anchor broke, and I drifted out to sea.

As I became aware, confident and content with all I am, I found dry land. I am learning, "I am enough."

After ending a recent phone conversation with a friend, I was exhausted. Like a psychic leech, she drained every bit of energy I had.

I am learning not to blame but to examine. Accepting responsibility, I asked, "What am I here to learn?"

I saw, once again, I

was losing my power. Playing her parent, I had tried to fix her brokenness.

I had given advice when she had asked for none. The next time we talked, I just listened. This time, I did not make her problems my own.

In both friendship and dating, I want a relationship of equals. No longer will I sacrifice myself for another. In my next relationship, I will stake my flag and shout, "I am!"

I will be watchful for when my power is waning. I will be aware when, like acid, fear bubbles forth.

I will address concerns despite my fear of abandonment and conflict. No longer will I be afraid of being alone.

I will not change myself for anyone nor try to change him or her, either. I will not become the parent or, worse, play the role of a child.

I will enjoy the relationship for what it is today instead of fantasizing about the future. I will see my friends and lovers for who they are and not the people I want them to be.

I will remember intimacy starts with sharing self, yet I will stop giving to the point I resent it. I will allow others to give to me in return.

But most of all, I will stay true to self and my values. I will remember all love begins with loving me.

In the past, I looked in the eyes of strangers searching for someone to complete me. I now look into the mirror knowing my search has come to an end.

I am grateful for these precious pearls and the exquisite necklace they are forming. Now more secure, confident and complete, I can stand steadfast in a relationship of equals. My personal power in place, I will not be swayed. **JS**

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10 warning signs for personal power outages

1. Not discussing concerns for fear of conflict or losing the other person.
2. Feeling like a child around your lover.
3. Acting like his parent.
4. Role-playing. Acting charming, overconfident, cheerful around the other person.
5. Giving more than comes back, sometimes to the point of resentment.
6. Fast-forwarding into the future while losing touch with the present.
7. Trying to change the person. Offering too much advice.
8. Ignoring inappropriate behavior.
9. Hoping your partner will change if only I am enough.
10. Obsessing about the other person or the relationship.

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