

## Intimate Human Relationship

Two people meet for the first time on a date. They get on well and begin to think this could be the beginning of something special. They look forward to seeing each other again and find themselves often looking at the phone for a text or call. If it doesn't come, they might get anxious and start to catastrophize and think the worst but when the phone does ring, they don't mention their fears to the other person. This is how human beings sign 'silent contracts', where the contract details are not shared for fear of what the impact is *assumed* to be.

The silent contract might look like this:

We will have regular sex, go on exotic holidays, go to the theatre and go out to restaurants regularly. Sounds great doesn't it? Friends might be envious of what appears to be so perfect.

Fast forward 5 years and a friend asks how it is going now. By then you might respond that the sex is non-existent, the last time we went out was to the supermarket, and when we talked about going out for a meal, we ended up getting a take-away!

Sometimes these changes represent the natural evolution of a relationship however, the changes need to be acknowledged and a decision made about whether the relationship continues to meet both people's needs. If the changes mean that needs are no longer met, then perhaps the relationship has to end, or alternatively, justifications can be created to remain the same e.g., "better the devil I know, than the devil I don't" or "I'm sticking around to wait for it to go back to the way it was". This is a contradiction in terms as 'going back to how it was' is the very opposite of 'natural evolution'. If natural evolution is not working for you, it may be time to make a new decision based on what matters for your own happiness and peace of mind.

## Substance Use Relationship

The same could be said of what happens when someone enters into a relationship with substances. At the beginning, everything is great, they enjoy the high and the view of the world it allows them to have. Problems slip away in the shadow of the 'buzz', and a silent contract is then made. The substance says "I promise that every time you use me, I will change the way you view the world and I will make it a better place for you to be in." During this time the user may forget about problems and be left wishing that they could always feel that way. This feeling can grow with each episode of using until it is impossible to think of feeling good without it. This tells us the relationship has changed.

Fast forward some years, and this relationship may now have become abusive and the rewards while smaller, are costing more and having devastating consequences. Substance use may be prioritised over everything else, you may feel like an outsider in your own life, you may get paranoid, you might never have any money and always looking for ways to raise funds for your substance. In the same way as with a personal relationship, this is the 'evolution' that either you choose to accept or, it's time to consider divorce! Your substance use might blame everything around you, encourage you to stick with it and that everything will be ok, or even that you might one day enjoy that delight as it was when you first met. But you know this is not true.

If you choose divorce, you may encounter unhelpful and unsupportive feedback from others. Remember this may be a reflection of how they feel about their own situation. Those who feel unable to get out of a difficult relationship are often critical of those who do, as it highlights their own lack of courage.

So be honest with yourself. Take a long hard look at the realities of your relationship with substances and ask yourself: “am I happy with the natural evolution of this relationship, or, is it time to think about divorce?” If you choose divorce, make sure you are clear about the reasons, as these will help you through the difficult times that may lay ahead.

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