

INTIMACY, SEX & RELATIONSHIP

Love May Be A Matter Of The Heart, But Use Your Head



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What can we really count on these days? How about love?

During a recent New York City cab ride, a Pakistani driver was on a rant about his life-insurance company going bust and “evaporating into thin air.”

“It’s all gone,” he complains. “I paid and paid for 20 years and have nothing to show for it!” Then there was a pause as he collected himself . . . and continued in a calmer tone.

“Nothing is permanent, you know.”

He looks at me through his rearview mirror. I nod, and he smiles — “Except for my wife and children, of course.” He then adds, “Our families were very wise when they introduced us.”

“Were you in love when you married her?” I asked, hoping I wasn’t being too intrusive. “You know, I have to say I wasn’t,” he admitted. “I didn’t know her well at all. But I knew it wouldn’t be long before I would love her. . . . She’s a great woman, and we have five children,” he added proudly.

Everything feels a little riskier these days. As the taxi takes its hairpin turns, I’m buffeted from side to side. I consider asking the driver to slow down, but by now he has turned on some wonderfully rhythmic Hindustani music. So I just pray I’ll get to my destination in one piece. Just then, Regis and Kelly come on the TV mounted behind the driver’s seat. “Make sure to buckle your seat belts for a safe ride,” they advise. Good idea. I comply — may as well improve my odds.

I love New York and its intensity. Crowds of shoppers, bicycle messengers winding through traffic with the precision of a master tailor’s needle, and the marching gray suits with their officious briefcases — ears plugged into one tech device or another. A slice of life viewed through a cab window. There are singles and couples — old and young. Some hold hands or walk arm in arm. Others seem barely connected. No doubt, many are in love. I wonder how they met or if their relationships will someday pass the taxi driver’s test of “permanence.”

With our divorce rate at 50 percent (in comparison with arranged-marriage divorce rates of between 5 percent and 7 percent), we’re certainly doing something wrong. There has been a growing interest in the subject of arranged marriages. (CBS recently picked up an arranged-marriage series.) Although research points to the happiness of these couples, we don’t know what standards were used to measure fulfillment.

As a clinical psychologist and sex therapist, patients ask me if I think true love is a decision of the heart or mind. I’ve never been a fan of forced-choice questions. Obviously both are important. You shouldn’t fall in love with your brain tied behind your back (although many do). Of course, chemistry matters. But it’s not enough. If all you have is lust, when the passion fades the relationship is usually in big trouble.

In these times of global uncertainty and plummeting consumer confidence in everything from peanuts to portfolios, reducing risk is on our minds. Given the staggering emotional, familial and economic costs of divorce, it makes sense that we might want to inject a bit more practicality into the romantic. Perhaps we should incorporate a phrase we’ve been hearing a lot lately — exercising “due diligence.” I don’t think Cupid will mind.

So, before you sign up for the most important partnership of your life — do your homework. Get the opinions of your friends and family, ask all the tough questions, and listen to your head along with your heart.

It can make the ride a whole lot smoother.

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