

***Connections***  
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***Namaste Without Naïveté:  
Why Romantic Relationships Fail***

In our last issue of *Connections*, we described our hope to encourage in our readers and program participants the attitude of *Namaste* - "The God in me welcomes the God in you" - when dealing with relationships. However, we also want to encourage *Namaste* without naïveté - the openness of *Namaste* must be coupled with an absence of naïveté. We need to develop an attitude of mindfulness in which we hold back from a blind rushing in where angels would fear to tread. This habit of mindfulness also requires that we cultivate and nurture a healthy desire to **avoid** unnecessary pain. While it may be that in some ultimate sense Samsara is Nirvana, that in some ultimate sense - the world as it is now is heaven - we also notice that even saints use potholders. Even saints try to avoid getting burned unnecessarily. Even Jesus of Nazareth advised us to be wise as serpents as we're being gentle as doves.

This issue of *Namaste* without naïveté is large and consumes a great proportion of the literature in interpersonal psychology. In our working practice we offer an ongoing program, which attempts to give people both the understanding and skills required to develop this delicate balance. It is our intention in this issue of *Connections* to take one important step towards understanding this vast topic.

For this issue our focus will be the essential psychological reasons romantic relationships can be marked by either chronic boredom or chronic destructive turmoil or both.

We believe that the first reason romantic relationships fail is because of a lack of chemistry. While arguments can be made about the wisdom behind arranged marriages, in our culture, we believe that deep emotional and physical chemistry is needed as a cushion and as glue to provide pleasure, solace and staying power for the long haul. We also believe that Harville Hendrix's concept of the Imago Match provides the most sophisticated and deep understandings of the nature and purpose of that "chemistry" to be found today (see Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*).

However, we may part company with the classic Hendrix/Imago view because of our belief that romantic relationships can fail even if there is chemistry. In addition to chemistry, we believe that romantic relationships can experience great unnecessary suffering if there is not a certain kind of shared value system, a certain commonly held sense of mission in life. In our programs we spend quite a bit of time helping single people articulate for themselves their values and sense of mission in life. We also help them develop the skills to safely and respectfully elicit the values of potential romantic partners. To paraphrase Sam Keen in his book, *Fire in the Belly*, it's very important to find out where one is going before inviting someone to go along. (For an interesting treatment of the concept of shared life mission in another culture, see *The Spirit of Intimacy-Ancient African Teachings in the Ways of Relationships* by Sobonfu Some). It is important to try to oppose and resist romantic love's tendency to blind us to value differences with a new romantic interest. It's also important to take on the challenge of discerning which differences can be enriching, and which will likely be destructive.

Finally, we believe that even if the couple has shared values and chemistry, their romantic relationship will likely be marred by chronic boredom or destructive turmoil if they lack the tools to effectively cope with the unavoidable problems and power struggles that romance will bring. Here again we believe that Harville Hendrix's work on the Intentional Dialogue and the Commitments of a Conscious Relationship provide some of the most helpful tools to anyone seeking to approach romance, or for that matter any relationship, with an attitude of *Namaste* - **without naïveté**.

**TRY IT OUT!**

Talk and listen with a friend about what values you believe are important to have in common with a romantic partner. What value differences might be challenging, but potentially enriching? What value similarities do you believe are non-negotiablely essential to you? For example, what value do you put on working on a relationship with deep truthfulness?

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*Bethesda-Chevy Chase Counseling & Consulting  
SinglesAndSoulmates*

4401 East West Highway, Suite 203

Bethesda, MD 20814

(301) 907-3377, ext. 94

Fax: (301) 907-3342

[info@bccounseling.com](mailto:info@bccounseling.com)

[www.bcccounseling.com](http://www.bcccounseling.com)

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