

26.

Choosing Abuse and Refusing Love



I can love myself, love you, and offer my deepest love to everyone—or I can hold back. This is my choice. And this same choice is yours, dear lover.

You and I have practiced the art of loving together. We have gone to teachers and taken workshops to help us open and love. We have read books about how to open our hearts and awaken to the divine that lives us. You and I both know what to do and how to open so we can offer the gifts that flow from our deepest heart. The only question is, will we?

Imagine you had a friend who was in a 1st stage relationship: Her man controls her, diminishes her, perhaps even beats her. But then they make love, he apologizes, and they connect in deep intimacy. A few days—or hours—later, he abuses her again, only to be followed by tearful periods of making up, contrition, and then passionate lovemaking.

She comes to you for advice. To you, it is obvious: she should leave her abusive man. She, however, thinks that is too drastic. She feels her man might be able to change. That he really *wants* to change, he just can't help himself. He is willing to see a therapist. He really loves her. She knows it.

She tells you how good it feels when they make love, how passionately he takes her. You understand what she says, and may crave a passionate man yourself, but you can't understand why she would tolerate his abuse. You try to help her understand that she could be with a man who would offer her passionate love without the abuse. She knows that's possible, but the void in her heart is being filled by her abusive man, and she doesn't trust that another man could love her so deeply.

Her choice is to be an active victim of his abuse, offering herself to him to be pummeled and then loved, in cycles. This is her choice. It is not your choice.

Your choice is to wait for a good man. You are more comfortable in the 2nd stage, taking care of yourself while your career progresses, your friends grow, and your life improves. Perhaps you have a man in your life, but you know that a deeper intimacy is possible. Or, perhaps you are waiting man-less, dating now and then, having lunch with men friends, but nothing serious.

You are probably not aware that, like your friend, you are *choosing* to be a victim of abuse. This mistreatment is not from a man, but from yourself. You are actively closing, protecting your heart from love, shutting down so your body and heart don't ache so openly. You may be damaging yourself as much as any man could damage you.

Every moment that you breathe more shallowly than you would while you were deeply making love, you are actively training your body to feel less, your heart to open less, your love to flow less. You don't need a man's raised fist to diminish you; you are diminishing yourself. You are choosing to stay in a relationship with yourself that diminishes you, just as your 1st stage friend is choosing to stay with a man in such a relationship.

A man's threat and your lack of trust create the same effect in you: Your body tenses, your breath becomes shallow, your muscles contract, your heart cringes, and you become numb. You may cry, wondering if it will ever end, if love will ever finally embrace you and enter you? Will you ever be able to trust love, or will you always live in doubt and fear? Your feelings can become so walled-off you aren't even consciously aware of them any more.

A man's abuse or your own self-abuse can become so familiar it feels normal. You can become so used to living a tense and contracted life that you no longer feel you are actively *choosing* to tense and contract. Your choice has become habit. You doubt there is really an option. You are afraid to risk opening larger than your tense stance of self-protective control, just like your friend is afraid to leave the confines of her man's control.

You have merely shifted your mistrust from external to internal doubt. You doubt love, so you buffer your heart and harden your body. You can become afraid to leave the familiar lifestyle—and tension—that continually abuses your heart. You've grown used to some suffering, and you truly love your well appointed home, your friends, your cat, your garden—just like your girlfriend loves her man's passion. Yet, both of you are choosing to play the victim to less love than you know, deep down, you deserve.

Tonight you may feel fine. You had a great evening dancing with your friends, enjoying a fine dinner, seeing a good movie. Tomorrow you may feel desperate, alone, ugly, worthless, unable to get out of bed. Your cycles

of emotional self-abuse resemble your girlfriend's cycles with her lover, being battered and making up, wanting to leave and wanting to stay—in any case, unwilling to open beyond the home of familiarity you have created, however inadequate the loving is.

Until you can feel the openness beyond your drama—he loves me, he loves me not; I'm fine by myself, but I long for a good man—your heart will remain tangled up in abuse. You will habitually choose your 1st stage dependence relationship or your 2nd stage separative independence, until your yearning for love breaks your heart open beyond the drama of love's coming and going.

You can continue to provide support for your girlfriend to leave her abusive man, but she won't leave until she is ready to stand on her own, away from the unending drama of being abused and passionately loved. Likewise, nobody can make you grow beyond your heart-protected independence until you are ready to trust love and yearn open without becoming entangled in the unending drama of aloneness and possible relationship.

Are you ready and willing to live devotionally open—feeling and loving the layers of deep hurt and pain as they peel away from your heart—and offer your deepest yearning even while a man's love and your self-love come and go?

At heart, beneath your habitually clenched shells, you *are* love. You can *choose* to surrender open as your heart's deepest yearning. You can breathe, speak, move, and live *as* love's yearning openness. But you may refuse to relax open because you are afraid to feel the immense pain still abiding in your vulnerable heart. Just as a financial or political challenge can give your man something to do with his life on the surface, an insufficiently loving relationship or mistrust of men may give you a drama to justify your refusal to open as your deepest heart's yearning.

How dramatic do you prefer the story of your refusal? Do you require a man to abuse and neglect you? Or have you grown beyond that need, so

you are quite able to abuse and neglect your own heart's deepest yearning? If you are not opening as love's fullest yearning right now, then you are refusing—*because you want to*. You can blame your man or his lack; you can blame yourself or your lack. But right now, you have a choice: Are you closing in tension or opening as your heart's deepest yearning, breathing, feeling, and opening as the love at the heart of all beings?