Broccoli vs. Chocolate
by COLLEEN LONG, psychologytoday.com | August 25, 2014

This month, I have come in contact with three different couples grappling with issues related to infidelity. Maybe it is the crispness of the fall air that propels some to flee, as if one last fling might keep winter's arctic bite at bay. Maybe I'm seeing the remnants of summer lust run amok, or perhaps many have forgotten that the fireworks we feel in the beginning stages of love aren't love at all- but mother nature's chemical spell, designed to get us in the sack with each other before we know the other one's last name.

In any case, when treating infidelity- I often use the "chocolate/broccoli" analogy. Our long term, loving, secure relationships are the "broccoli," in this scenario. They are the things that, if we stay committed to, consistently over time- grow us up. They make us healthier, more evolved, more balanced, well-rounded individuals. However, chocolate comes along in life (just like opportunities for affairs) and tempts us with ideas like "how wonderful would life be if I could just eat chocolate all the time?" or "this must be the thing I was MEANT to eat all my life." But we all know that no good can come of a long term diet consisting of only chocolate.

Our brains' rewards centers kick in and neglect to remind us that a diet solely subsisting on chocolate would not only slowly chip away at our personal health but is not a realistic long term plan. After the fairy dust has settled, the dopamine and other neurochemicals that provide us with that temporary high, that I-just-can't-get-him-out-of-my-mind feeling- go away more quickly than cinderella at midnight. We are left staring at our so called "soulmate," with many questions- most notably "who are you really?" and "how do I get my life back in order?"

Unfortunately, many clients I see in private practice, have left in the aftermath of their infidelity - a barrage of destruction; houses torn apart, children in therapy, court-ordered family treatment, and thousands of dollars in attorney and mediator fees to name a few. For what? A buzz? An escape?

Ultimately, many of those that have affairs a) don't end up with the person they had the affair with in the end b) whomever they do end up with, realize that it is just a different set of problems that puts them right back in the same emotional gridlock that got them there in the first place.

So what is one to do if they find that the state of their marriage has gone stale and they have fallen victim to the intoxicating whiff that new lust brings? The following are the top five elixirs for affair proofing your self and your relationship:

1. Understand that whenever you come to an emotional impasse with your partner, within this gridlock lay the keys to your own personal growth and development if you can hang in there long enough.
2. **You are literally under the influence** when you are starting off with someone else, so trust nothing. You know nothing about them and fill in all the holes with the fantasy that you want them to be, the fantasy of how you would be with them, and the fantasy that all of your infantile needs would surely be met if only you were with them. Being in the midst of an affair is structurally and neurochemically akin to trying out crack or cocaine for the first time. Would you trust your judgement if you decided to give these two drugs a whirl?

3. An affair doesn't start in the bedroom. It usually starts in the office lunchroom, or softball field. **An affair starts when you open a window to your soul with someone other than your partner.** If you aren't opening that window to your partner—THAT is what you need to be addressing in couples therapy. Why you can't be your authentic self with your partner anymore, why it would seem easier to tuck pieces of yourself away and save them for a stranger.

4. **No matter how high you're flying right now, there will be a fall,** and it usually won't end in love. What comes up, must go down. Not only will you be left to confront the issues you failed to confront in the first relationship, but now you are an "adulterer," with a questionable moral compass, deteriorated self-perception, and guess how that informs future behavior?

5. **If there are children involved, what legacy are you cultivating for them?** Are you teaching them that when the going gets tough, you get going? Are you teaching them to subconsciously loathe their mom/father because they weren't "good enough" to keep you? Are you teaching them to never trust the affection/love that you give them, because you've shown it can change in the drop of a hat?

Obviously, there are marriages and relationships that have run their course. There are deal-breakers such as substance abuse/addiction, physical/sexual abuse, and/or verbal abuse that usually lead to the end of a marriage/relationship… and there are those who have just simply grown apart. They are no longer the people they once were and no longer compatible in a way that would sustain a healthy, loving relationship.

However, if you are in the midst of an affair, contemplating an affair, or are torn between a double life you have created for yourself, at least give your partner a fighting shot and address the things within your self you no longer want to deal with. Give them the gift of knowing what needs to change and take that risk together. They say character is what you do when no one is looking, how's your character looking today?

You can find out more about the author at her website: drcolleenlong.com.