

# LOVE & EGO

As the song (sort of) goes, you can't have one with the other.

By Gemma B. Allen

Oprah fans know that a recent Book Club selection of hers was *A New Earth* by Eckhart Tolle. Club participants have been asked to consider and report on their “aha” moments about the awakening of one’s consciousness.

My “aha” moments have come from my work as a family law attorney.

When a man or woman comes in to see a divorce attorney, they generally have a laundry list of grievances about his or her soon-to-be former spouse. Complaints range from the seemingly inconsequential to the overwhelmingly compelling. In the cases where the complaints are addictions, unrepentant cheating and the like, it’s clear how the marriage broke down. But Eckhart’s book helped crystallize the source and seriousness of two more subtle but repetitive reasons relationships fail:

## 1. “My partner is just too critical.”

All of us, but some more than others, find ourselves often being critical. “Complaining is one of the ego’s favorite strategies for strengthening itself,” says Eckhart.

Both in our heads and in our speech, we reinforce our own importance and rightness by emphasizing the wrongness of others. However, what I see in my practice is that the price of always being “right” eventually leads to the relationship going wrong.

The truth is there are very few absolute rights or wrongs in day-to-day living. Whether breakfast is lavish or simply nutritious, whether the children buy or bring their lunches, whether dinner is at 5:30PM or 7PM, whether someone watches television in their suit or shorts and how much time anyone spends on the phone or online are not ultimate moral issues. They are simply preferences, but when taken to the extreme, they become issues of ego and control that can break down the marriage.

One person’s insistence that the other do it their way, on their time schedule or act only with their permission can wear down the other partner – and will eventually wear out the relationship. When such insistence is compounded by name-calling, demeaning comments and character assassination, the end will be sooner rather than later.

It may help to understand that anyone berating you about inconsequential items is doing it from his or her own sense of ego weakness. However, unless the other person has the capacity to understand themselves, and to work to change the dynamics, the odds are that the marriage will break down irretrievably because its very spirit is broken.

## 2. “My partner is not really there for me.”

Often a client will describe how desperately alone they have felt in their relationship, but they will simultaneously describe all the things they and their spouse do or have accomplished together. Their children are in good



schools and participate in extracurricular activities, while the parents have good standing in the community and their financial assets are growing.

According to Eckhart, the mistake many of us make is that we confuse “doing” with “being.” We play roles of husband and wife, parent and child, and we get things done. We help each other and our children get all the tasks of life accomplished, but we lose sight of simply being fully “present” for each other. We confuse our “roles” with who we really are and want to be, and leave our partners feeling more like co-workers than lovers.

In my observations of marriage failures, there are times in a relationship when that is more likely to occur: When we, as new parents, become so consumed with this “new role” and all of its responsibilities that we forget what brought us together in the first place. When, in our careers, we get so much satisfaction through job promotions, awards and publicity that we forget to share the success with our partner. Or when we, as a long-time married couple that has built its life around the family, face the empty nest syndrome and fail to make a new commitment to each other as individuals. One whole purpose of the marriage has been accomplished, and now we must strive to re-bond and rebound.

In our too busy world, a married couple has to be vigilant so that relationships do not simply become task-oriented but instead loving partnerships. ■

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