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resending

1 message

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Hi Dr. James - I sent the below @ 3:34AM this morning, but didn't see it in my sent items when i looked later.

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I started this a while ago, with the intention of writing a single, coherent summary/narrative of my thoughts on our status and looking back. Right now, I just don't have the time, energy, or will to do that this week. What's resulted is some copy/paste from previous notes I've written, some outlined format, etc. I've not reread the below, so it's likely not coherent in places, definitely not fully thought out/written out. I at least wanted to put some of these things out there so you would have the opportunity to think about them before Wed. and let me know your thoughts on whether the theme(s) are off-base.

I have made a pretty dramatic shift from feeling like I have a huge burden on my shoulders of wanting/trying to keep this family together and absolutely dreading/fearing the impact that this split would have on my kids, to realizing that there is no healthy environment I could provide for my kids with Kim and I together, if she is unwilling to address and take ownership of the issues she has created in our relationship. I am focusing on her actions, because I believe that I have been open to discussing/addressing my shortcomings in our relationship and the negative outcomes that I've created, and I feel like the vast majority of our time in therapy with you has been Kim presenting a list of grievances, many (or most) aimed at me, with some tangents into our pasts that may have contributed to one action or another, but for the most part never addressing Kim's contributions to very serious problems.

There is a lengthy explanation as to what I've taken away from reading the Daring Greatly book, which couches a lot the foundations of personality and personal relationships in terms of shame, trust, and vulnerability. I have put a lot of time into thinking about how these forces have influenced Kim and my relationship. I am having a hard time putting much time or energy into coming back to these thoughts and putting them down in writing after our last session.

I am going to avoid the tendency to caveat these issues with my enabling behavior (like not calling out Kim's actions in therapy earlier), because I think that it's counterproductive at this point. I am aware of these conditions, and I'm not going to provide any further cover for not addressing the things that have not been addressed to this point. So, this will come off as extremely one-sided and figure pointing, I am sure.

Lately, I've been focused on the ways in which my behavior in our relationship can be explained by these principles. Because these insights are fresh, and because (as I'll describe in more detail later) in all of the therapy work that Kim and I have done, I believe that there's been a constant theme of "these are Kim's gripes, and here's how Brad would have to address them for this relationship to work," the majority of my thoughts around this has been "these are the ways that Kim has created/reinforced the patterns that she finds most problematic."

I think it started early on that Kim started feeling resentment toward me that she moved to New York to be with me. She didn't like that she was moving *for* anyone, she didn't like that she was moving *for a man*. She, maybe a bit later, didn't like that she left a house that she just bought a few months before. She didn't say that she was moving *for me*, she emphatically stated to me and everyone else, that she had always wanted to live in NYC, and this was her opportunity. She does not, and did not adjust well, and was depressed pretty much all of the time. She would say things like "there's no water here...I miss the water in MN...I have to be around water." We were on an island. She lamented how hard it was to meet people, and how hard city life was, etc. She just didn't adjust well. I did. I loved the city. I loved just being a part of the city - I had somewhat of a social life with my coworkers, but mainly just appreciated the situation that I was in, in my early 30's in a worldly city, interested in my work. She lamented not only

that she had moved and sacrificed for a man, she was not happy, but I was seemingly content. I am, by nature, able to find happiness, or at least able to be content, rather easily (or at least in those days, when life was much simpler).

She moved back to MN, and I stayed in NYC for a year. That didn't help this resentment. When I moved back to MN, this hostility really took hold. And what I'm seeing now as an assault on the person who could dare to be happy in her time of misery. Maybe this was conscious, maybe it wasn't. But the first memorable event took place where she "shamed me" in front of my younger brother who had come to stay with us. This was one of the early betrayals of trust in a series which had the effect of telling me that she was not someone who was safe to be vulnerable around. So as a result, the person that she "fell in love with" was no longer present in that relationship. That part of me was/is present in other relationships, which is why until recently I didn't understand her perception of me changing. I continued to try to play the part, and do the things that I thought she expected me to do as a partner, but never really felt the drive within myself. There is a vulnerability required in trying to do something to genuinely make your partner happy, and at some point, that willingness to be vulnerable had been completely exhausted. Some examples of these betrayals of trust have been discussed, but are worth mentioning:

- "I almost left you" conversations.
- She got a black eye in softball, and was out in public and joked about me punching her and giving her the black eye. I told her that was not funny - it is terribly offensive to me, and not something to joke about, especially in public. When my friend (Bryan again ...) came to town a few days later we were out to dinner, and I brought up how this had happened, and that women may not appreciate the power that they wield when suggesting, even in jest, that a man is a physical abuser. Bryan and Kim and I went out to dinner. The previous incident came up in conversation somehow - Bryan (rather effeminate guy) articulated the same basic position about how to the person being subjected to that "joke" it is really not funny. A few cocktails later, Kim did the same thing - on a crowded patio with lots of people around, loudly told the server that "He was the one that gave me the black eye."
- Sale of the house, how all that went down
- Talking about our relationship and issues with a mutual friend, who I am much closer with than her, so when I saw him on the street, the first thing he said was "so Kim says things are so bad between y'all, and there's no working through it huh? She says that it's all Brad, but I know Kim, and I'm sure that's not the whole story" we talked a few times for more than a few hours...but talking about our private details of our relationship with a mutual friend is not OK to do, and then trying to frame me as some terrible person who is responsible for all of the woes.
- Turning situations around and blaming me for her unhappiness after the fact:
 - The move to NYC (she framed it as she always wanted to, then acted as if I owed her something for it).
 - The move to GA - until recently, I forgot that she had plans for GA - she was in-love with the idea of potentially working for the CDC, and that was a reason for coming down, but after the fact, it's just a simple "I moved for you, and it messed up my career."
 - When I was working 80-hr weeks consistently for a long time in my career, it was "you don't value the right things, you don't know what's important and shouldn't work so much." when I got to making a good living based on that work, and providing for the family "your career is not more important than mine" grudge

I conceded the "break" in therapy, because I didn't feel like she was ever going to get pressed to be accountable. There had been plenty of opportunities, times in which if the shoe were on the other foot, I believe we would have had length consideration for "what was behind my actions," but she just successfully side-stepped or blew up the conversation and was never held to account:

- The sale of the house. The way that conversation was left was "Brad, you shouldn't have expected anything different, given Kim's history." I just accepted that, because I could see the validity in the point. However, in hindsight, the validity of the point was for the responsible allocation of the proceeds from the sale of the house - we were not getting financial advice, this point was to address the issue as it dealt with our relationship. And whether Kim had done that in the past or not, does not absolve her of the responsibility to have a discussion about that money - and not doing so undermined the relationship further. This point was barely touched on, if not completely ignored once I conceded that I could have taken more initiative to follow up.

- The division of labor/income "blow up conversation":
 - This was a discussion about division of labor how to effectively and equitably make the household work - she successfully steered the conversation to "I won't make as much money as you..."
 - The dynamics of earning potential was irrelevant to the conversation
 - BECAUSE I'M A WOMAN was the intended bait for which I fell - for two reasons.
 - I have a problem in just letting go things that like which are even stated as an aside, which are blatantly false pretenses. My examples to counter this were that there are women who work above me and make a lot more money than I do - there are probably women above her who make more money, and we didn't have time, nor was it the place to have the conversation about how and why the often-quoted .73/100 conversation is a completely disingenuous argument, and a detriment to the cause of reducing/removing the actual gender pay gap which remains, when accounting for confounding variables
 - She was using the above to reframe the conversation, placing her as a victim.
 - We never finished a constructive conversation about the contributions to household, etc.
- The conversation that we had around the fight that she started after a conversation with my friend about "when is she going to quit working."

Other outstanding issues that we never addressed, and are concerns going forward regardless of relationship status:

- Kim is and always has been virtually impossible to have a conversation about anything on which we disagree. There is no amount of logic, number of supporting facts that will sway her from her position ... even when they're really important (kids' schools, etc. Examples of reductio ad absurdem conversations). Her mom's comments about how unreasonable and stubborn she has always been;
- Her complete rejection of anything "middle class"
 - Absolute refusal to live outside of the city - even when it means better schools, safer neighborhoods, more affordable living. There is no argument that she'll even listen to on this, and when pressed on why, she doesn't have a consistent story over the years. Has argued for things like...diversity. However when I pointed out that the suburb that my friend and his family live in is FAR more diverse than our neighborhood - some completely different point gets brought up. Somehow, now the diverse population is not a point in the "Pro" column for consideration.
 - Talking as if she's poor all of time, in embarrassing ways many times (not so much an issue if/when separated, other than she will harbor resentment for her financial situation)
- Her idea that swearing around kids is OK (I think she thinks it's cool). I don't get the impression that other parents think so. I certainly don't. Telling Kim that I don't think that it's appropriate to say fuck, shit, etc. in front of a 3yr old hasn't had any impact in the past, and we're just not in a place that I would be comfortable, nor would she welcome any kind of assessment of the correctness of her behavior
- Her embarrassing, child-like, reaction to manners in the past (wedding). She had no concept of not 'digging in' to your plate before everyone had been served while in a semi-formal seated meal.
- Just lack of judgement - with kids most importantly. Doesn't understand the "algorithm" for risk avoidance of things with low-probability/high-impact (two examples of knives, rowan walking near street @ 2)

For my impressions of these experiences, I do question whether or not this is just me filtering what I expect to hear. In looking back not just in therapy, but in our relationship, the narrative that seems overwhelmingly clear is "you're not adequate, you're lucky I'm staying with you." This is evidenced by the multiple "I've just come back from a 'soul-searching journey, and I almost left you," among other more subtle things. In those times when we were at a

crossroads - I was not telling myself "I'm just this inadequate guy, if she leaves, whatever will I do with myself." The decisions that I've made to stay at those times, were more "I'm invested thus far with this person, I owe her something, and the chances of having kids dramatically reduces if I start over at 35 (or whatever age)." I feel like I need to make that clear because the picture that I've painted feels somewhat like a crippling sense of inadequacy and insecurity has continuously kept me begging Kim to stay in this relationship. However, in retrospect after having made the decision that the "best" way forward was to stay together and I pursued that, I can see how she could have gotten the impression that this was the case which served to snowball things to follow.

I have also come to understand recently, that a probable contributor to some of the lack of progress made in our relationship from therapy was due to me not challenging her more, and that is because I have been working on keeping my family together, and not our relationship. I hadn't been pressing her because I don't believe that would have been helpful, because I can see her "blowup" reactions to challenges, which is why they've only come out when I've been in a place where I really didn't care what the outcome was. I understand the feedback loop that my behavior creates as well - what I didn't fully appreciate is the not only unsustainable, but unhealthy environment/example of people and relationships that this would instill in my kids.

Being free from the burden of trying to preserve this (newly realized) unsustainable situation, I'm more free to express the challenges that I see in our relationship that we're going to have as co-parents. If Kim does not adopt a more reasonable approach, she is going to create the worst of all conditions for our co-parenting relationship and the impact to our kids. Without the maintenance of the façade, I'm no longer going to be concerned with her irrational reactions to conversations on an emotional level - only on a practical level for getting done what's best for our kids.

I don't know how many more sessions we're likely to have - but I'm not going to just come out with *all* of this with Kim right away, as it's not in my best interest as a practical matter to do so until a path has been taken (and likely cemented). In addition, I'm simply not likely to ever be in a place of vulnerability with her again, so that's also going to limit some things.