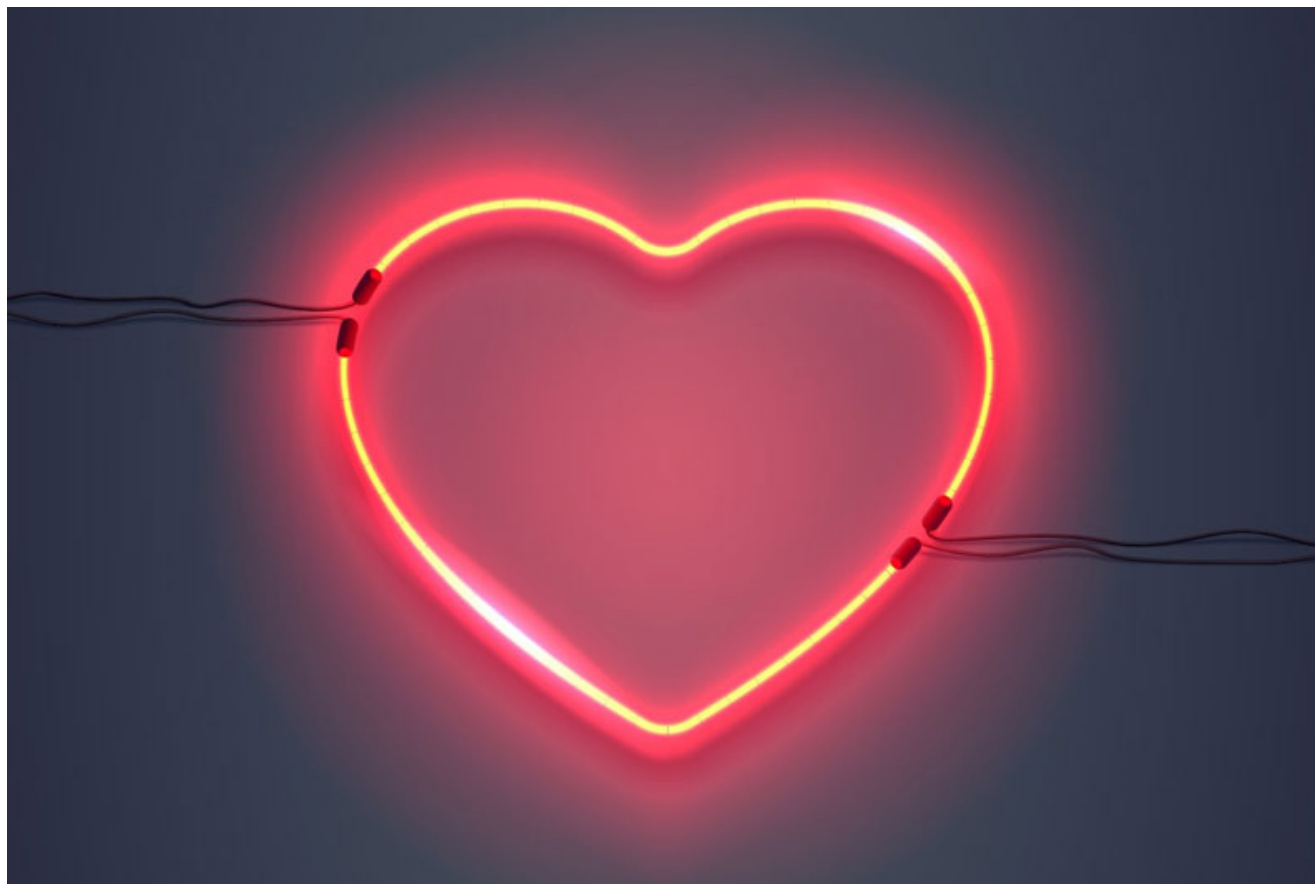


“I fell in love with a married man.”

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Q: I fell in love with a married man. We had been such close friends and then developed feelings for each other. We haven't done anything wrong, but I really care about him.

A: This is such a great question. What you have described is something that almost every human being who is alive and who has any kind of significant contact with another person will experience at some point.

Right off the bat, I want to be sensitive to your feelings. Most likely, you are very hurt. Even if you weren't looking for anything like this, it is very easy to feel guilty or to feel used or misled. I do not want to add to that guilt or hurt.

The first thing is to note that your feelings are neither “right” nor “wrong”. Of course, this is not the same thing as claiming that one's actions are neither right nor wrong. What we choose to do with our emotions can certainly be good or evil, but the simple fact of feeling a certain way is neither good nor bad.

I am sure that you are aware of this: while your feelings for your friend are neither good nor evil, what you do with those feelings has the potential to be sanctifying or damning. Our actions have the potential to be liberating or devastating.

It is very likely that you didn't want these feelings. You may have even trusted your friend to be more "on guard" against them than you thought that you needed to. You probably didn't do anything to conjure them into existence. My guess is that you just started spending time together and those feelings developed on their own. This is another reason not to panic; feelings just "happen".

Your feelings can no more discern between right and wrong than your sense of smell is able to tell you what color the walls are painted.

Feelings are not a reliable indicator regarding the next action a person should take. They kind of just "are". Your feelings can no more discern between right and wrong than your sense of smell is able to tell you what color the walls are painted.

Romantic feelings are of the exact same category. One of our modern problems however (since the Age of Romance) is that we seem to treat romantic feelings as having some special "power" or insight. They don't. In fact, if you live for any number of years, you will realize that romantic feelings come and go almost more easily than any other emotion.

Sheldon Vanauken once wrote about this in an essay entitled "The (False) Sanction of Eros". He pointed out that many people claimed some kind of special privilege or dispensation from their promises or vows because "the other person makes me feel so in love". Or the person who says, "Being with so-and-so makes me want to be a better person...".

Hogwash.

Being a "better person" means: making the choice to keep one's vows or helping the other person keep their vows by removing yourself from the situation.

You indicated that you haven't "acted out" on these feelings. This is very good. But it seems that many people can be tempted to think that cheating is limited to acting out sexually.

While this is the most obvious form of infidelity, there are many steps that are potentially just as destructive and harmful on the way to these actions.

I invite you to reflect on some other ways that could reveal where your heart is.

The amount of time spent with your friend.

What you say and how you speak with each other.

The number of times you text. Would you want his spouse to read your texts? Not just the

words, but the frequency and the time of day or night?

Do you find yourself sharing things with him that only his wife should share? Are you his source of intimacy?

When a couple gets married, they promise fidelity. In simple terms, this means: my spouse is the only legitimate source of romance in my life.

Other relationships exist. Other friendships exist. There may be other people (members of the same sex only) who are confidantes. But when it comes to romance, your spouse is the only place you look. Not books. Not movies. Not Facebook. Not old letters from old flames. Not co-workers. Not friends of the opposite sex.

| You either feed a crush...or you starve it.

You have a crush. Crushes are very simple to deal with. Regardless of whether this is a crush on an old friend or on someone you just met, there are only two responses. You either feed a crush...or you starve it.

“But, but, but, we are old friends!”

But, but, but, he is married.

And, and, and, your relationship with each other has changed; it is no longer platonic. So the decision is made. I don't mean to be rude or insensitive about this. But the sooner all people in your situation get their heads out of their asses and wake up, the better for everyone involved.

How can I keep this relationship? Again, I don't mean to be a jerk, but you can't. Unless you want to make some decisions that will destroy your life and devastate his family, you have to choose to starve this relationship.

The next step is simple. It is not easy. But it is clear.