

# Is It A Myth That You Need To Be Alone After A Long Relationship?

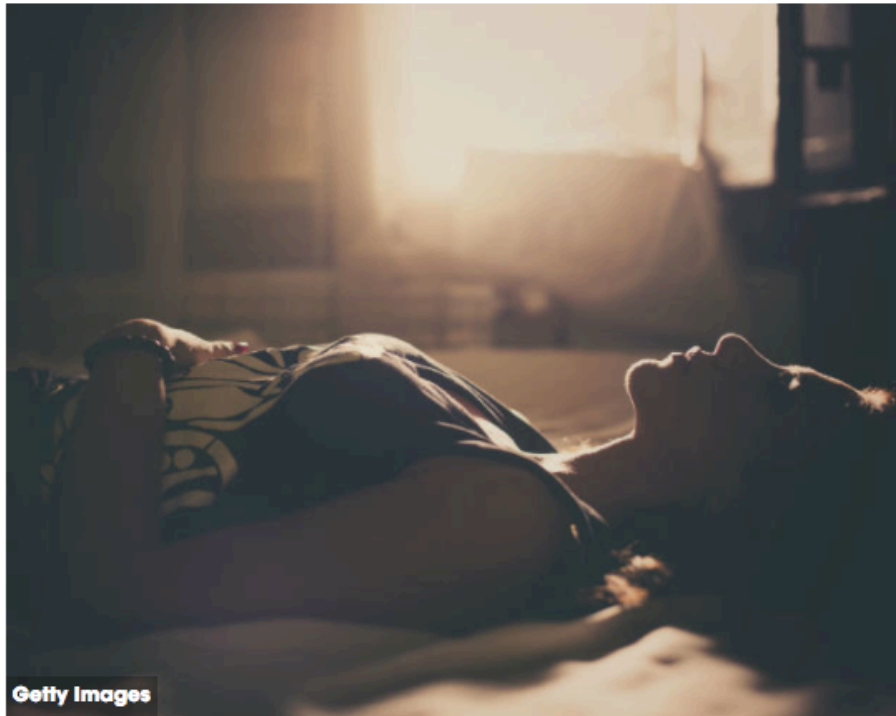


by: Mia Arderne

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What happens when a very long and mostly beautiful relationship comes to an end? When the chasms stretch too wide and the finality of the break-up becomes real, and leaves you reeling? The prevailing advice is that you need to be alone, to reflect, to reset – almost as if there’s a pre-break-up state you can return to. But there’s no going back. You already see things through their eyes. You see *yourself* through their eyes. You’ve accumulated another gaze, another personhood, another version of yourself. So what comes next?

## 1. Feeling the fear

There’s always the fear – the bone-chilling, isolated ‘oh shit no one will ever love me unconditionally’ fear. And I mean real, I’m-old-and-have-emphysema-and-can’t-control-my-bowel-movements unconditionally. The kind of love when, even though all things taut and tight and flawless and vital have left you, that person would still be there, loving you, still looking at you like you’re everything. And now the person you thought might be that person, is gone.

## 2. You're 'not ready'

At this stage you're meant to take time to heal and be alone to process. But you may meet someone new before you're ready, when you're five-minutes single. You ask yourself, will they do the same thing for you as your ex would have? Will you ever find someone who will? You may never, and that's why it's terrifying. It's terrifying one week after the break-up. It's terrifying two years after the break-up. But when you operate from a place of fear, you do yourself a great disservice. And this is why solitude after a break-up - while helpful - may not be the only way through it. That advice is too simple.

## 3. It's messy and there are no rules

There are no rules for this place. You've left your home. You're outside. You're re-writing parts of your identity. You cannot put finality to anything here. Timeframes, intensity of emotion, physicality, space - they all become malleable. You've lost your default setting, your default person, your base. You've left a family of two.

You have to learn to trust yourself again as something other than a-half-of-two. And you will fuck up as you learn to do that. So do it and forgive yourself in advance. On doing wild, ill-advised shit post break-up: all you have now is your rusty intuition. It's day-by-day when all the narratives you've been feeding yourself for years are melting.

If at some level, you felt the relationship dying while you were still in it, you may be prepared already in ways you don't realise. The subconscious is strong like that. At the same time, you're so extremely vulnerable and un-tethered. Hopefully the person who finds you in their arms - at your most honestly broken - is decent. Protect your space. Be deliberate about who you let into it. But know that even the *most deliberately chosen* may still screw you up.

## 4. You're free in new ways

On the upside, this space gives you the opportunity to be more robustly yourself. In those small ways you couldn't be fully yourself in your historical five-plus year relationship, you can now. You can inhabit yourself more unapologetically - because you've just been destroyed. You simultaneously feel younger and older. You can re-identify as boldly yourself. To the next person who comes along, you can reveal yourself in your fullness. And if they don't like it - bye! You've just been through it; they can't shake you.

## 5. How else to stay sane

What do you need? Maybe you do need to be alone. Maybe for you, it's channeling the pain into career mobility. Maybe you need to bury it in religion or console yourself in family. Meditation. Sex. Or even love. Alcohol. Food. Retail. New aesthetics. Maybe it's all of the above. Maybe it's some in measured amounts. What it definitely isn't is prescriptive or absolute or one-size-fits-all.

Although it's an unpredictable space, you can still be deliberate. Be deliberate about which music you listen to, about how you curate your social media feeds, about what you're watching and who you're spending time with. Protect yourself.

But don't close yourself off either: be open to spaces and people that indulge your magic. They're rare, and not always what you expect. Never deny yourself your own magic, especially the new, stranger strands. And don't listen to people; everyone projects.

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