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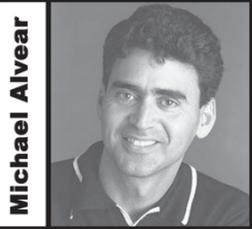
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AP Associated Press

*"This Above All... To Thine Own Self
Be True. And it must follow, as the night the
day, thou canst not then be false to any man."
• Shakespeare / Hamlet / I / III*



Michael Alvear

Slouching Though Gomorrah

Expressions

The Dating Game: "No" is Better than "Maybe"

No is better than Maybe. I learned that the hard way. I met a guy. Sparks flew. The voltage was so high a surge protector wouldn't have helped.

We talked for a long time. I took a chance. I kissed him.

He kissed me back with the same tenderness. Later, I asked him if he wanted to come home with me. "I don't know," he said. "Maybe."

I wasn't rejected that night; I was "ambivalent." In the dictionary of dating, it means the object of your affection mentally works out the pros and cons of going home with you while you're standing in front of him.

There is something so painful about being single. It's hard to hold onto your dignity. And the more beautiful the guy the less hold you have. I cannot, in reflecting back, believe that I just stood there while this guy tried to make up his mind in front of me.

I was stuck that night. The dirt between dignity and desire turns to mud pretty quickly. How do you get out? Rejection, as painful as that can be, gives you closure. Like a wooden board placed under the wheels, it gives traction so you can move on.

But ambivalence. It provides no traction at all. You're not going anywhere. It makes you think maybe there's still a chance. It makes you think there's something you can say to win him over. It makes you think you can do something to make him stay. It makes you hallucinate.

I came home that night -alone— and didn't go out for weeks. Hurt and humiliated, I couldn't understand how 45 minutes with a stranger could result in two

weeks of licking my wounds. It is a peculiarly gay thing, I think, to get so deeply invested in so short a time in such an artificial setting.

How do you deal with the pain that comes with being single?

Kahlil Gibran once said "Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding. Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain."

If you're single, you are going to know pain. In fact, being single is often an exercise in pain management.

strategy for easing the pain." It just happened.

I wished him peace and prosperity. In my mind I saw him dating a guy he liked, working in a job he loved, prospering in every way.

It was an odd feeling to bless someone who had humiliated me. I usually reserve my prayers and blessings for family and friends who are kind and loving to me.

That's when I got what Gibran was talking about. The "breaking of the shell" helped me understand who I could be in the face of cruelty and rejection.



It didn't feel like a "shell" got broken that night. It felt more like my heart. Besides, what was there to understand about the pain of being single—how to avoid it? How to diminish its effect? How to extract revenge for it?

In the middle of a meditation one evening I did something I'd never done before. I blessed the guy who had humiliated me. Spontaneously. I mean, I didn't plan to do it or think, "here's a good

I could have been mean and vindictive. I could have wished the guy ill, not well. I could have wholesaled my anger to all the friends who cared about me; I could have retailed my bitterness to all the friends who've gone through something similar. I was justified in doing all those things.

But I didn't. Because the shell broke. The shell that has always kept me from rising above the harshness of being single.

In my meditation I peered through the remains of the broken shell and here's what I saw: Being kind to the kind isn't kindness; it's reciprocity. Being kind to the unkind, that's kindness. Because it's unconditional, because it doesn't depend on the circumstances. Because its expression doesn't depend on whether the other person deserved it.

I still think "No" is better than "Maybe." It's less painful, anyway. The only thing "Maybe" has going for it is the ability to crack shells.

If it doesn't crack your heart first.



Michael Alvear lives with his lesbian Labrador and girlie-boy Vizsla. Constantly demanding to get paid for his frivolous work, he can be reached at MAIvear@ExpressGayNews.com

The Express Stylebook Policy

For the sake of readable newswriting, the word "gay" in 'The Express' should, when relevant, be interpreted to be inclusive of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, transgendered people, two-spirited people, intersexed people, men-who-have-sex-with-men, women-who-have-sex-with-women, queers, homosexuals, sexual minorities, and people who are unsure of their sexual orientation, but think they might be gay. Here is an example: "Toronto's gay-pride parade is bigger than Vancouver's."