

Dear John,



Dear John,

*I was in a serious relationship for four years and neither of us was a saint. He cheated, I cheated, he lied, I lied. He also belittled me in front of my friends and one night embarrassed me so badly that I drove home alone in shameful tears. And yet, as I write this, it's hard to remember the full extent of my sadness back then or all the circumstances contributing to it. I remember instead his cute smile, his sexy cologne, the passionate way we made love and the laughs we shared. It's almost as if I've forgotten the ways he hurt me.*

*The good times were so good that I am considering getting back with him. But I realize it is probably a mistake. Why is it so hard to remember the bad and so easy to miss the good?*

Signed,

Bright Side

Dear Bright Side

Have you ever noticed that good memories are typically more vivid than bad ones? We remember sights, sounds and smells of good memories while bad memories are short on detail and layered in fog.

There are many reasons why good is remembered over bad. One physiological reason is because the brain stores good and bad memories differently. When a memory is painful, the brain does you a favor by breaking it into small pieces and compartmentalizing it in the recesses of your mind. That way it is hard to get at, complicated to reassemble, and less likely to cause pain in the future.

Conversely, the brain stores good memories as a solid unit in a place readily accessible. The brain wants you to remember good memories as you'll be more likely to stay positive and live a happier life.

Your brain has given you this gift--a present, as it were, to help you toward a happy future. But don't let the gift fool you. If you are considering reconciliation, make a list of the pros and cons. Writing an honest and thorough list will force you to look realistically about the relationship's probability of success instead of idealistically about what could be.

We'd all like to forget our bad pasts. But forgetting them makes us susceptible to repeating them. If you let yourself be fooled, you're likely to become a fool.

Thanks for playing,

John