

How to Find a Heavenly Mate Right Here on Earth



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Another relationship went south and you ask yourself why. You found this great guy (or gal). Your eyes met across a crowded room, and—wow! Heaven and earth moved. You just knew that this was The One. The two of you got acquainted on a couple of heady dates and hopped into bed. It was an electric experience. Then suddenly it was over. Now your partner in crime is history, and you want your money back.

What's wrong with this picture? Well, let's see.

Suppose you were chairman of the board of a Fortune 500 company and you wanted to hire a chief financial officer. How would you go about it? Would you pick the cutest chick in the bar or the guy at the party with the flashing eyes and good teeth? Hardly!

More likely you would advertise the position, accept applications, and comb through résumés. You would check educational credentials, dates of employment, and references. You would schedule not just one interview but a number. You would evaluate the applicant's overall presentation, track record, social skills, work habits, and attitude toward colleagues and past bosses (among other things).

Why would you be less cautious about investigating a potential partner? You certainly don't have less at stake. Furthermore, if you don't screen carefully, the default settings on your personal operating system will take over. Then you will find yourself with the mate your family-of-origin experiences programmed you to seek out.

Your default settings may be fine if your parents were healthy, *emotionally available*, and committed to making their partnership successful come boom or

bust—and if you managed to keep your canoe off the rocks during your childhood and adolescence.

But if alcohol, drugs, disease, trauma, or other crippling forms of adversity took a toll on your family, watch out. When you circulate socially even decades later, you may unconsciously be asking for more of the same. Treat the urge to rush a relationship into intimacy as a particularly noteworthy sign of danger.

Did you spot that phrase “emotionally available”? It means that you and your prospective partner are mature, fully functional adults. You are each prepared to take responsibility for yourself—financially, emotionally, and otherwise—no matter what. You are able to hear the other person’s needs and wants while staying mindful of your own. You will be interdependent rather than dependent on each other.

You are each willing to risk the hurt of rejection because you know that you can handle it if you need to. Finally, you are both prepared to commit to a relationship in which each of you will forfeit some freedoms for the pleasure of companionship. Each of you must be able to initiate intimacy, to accept intimacy, and to decline intimacy, where intimacy is not just of the sexual variety but the sharing of your deepest feelings.

To learn more about your own personal programming, review your past relationships one by one. In hindsight, what were the red flags? List the negative traits that fit more than one lover. These will be the signs that you must watch for and carefully avoid, especially if you think they undermined the long-term prospects.

Develop a vision. Write it down. How would your ideal marriage or partnership look? What characteristics would ensure compatibility? Pay attention not just to personal qualities but to everyday life—tastes in food, leisure activities, housekeeping, politics, childrearing, and pets, for instance. (Add to this list.)

Look for someone who, like you, gives top priority to finding a long-term companion. Consider how well he takes care of himself emotionally as well as physically, financially, and legally (no married individuals need apply!). Extend trust incrementally, and wait to see how she handles each bit before you offer more. (Never trust anyone 100 percent.)

Place a premium on open communication. Explain what you are looking for, and watch the response. Are the goals you each have a good fit? Clarify your boundaries and expectations. As you observe, ask yourself the following questions. (Never mind the pronouns. All of the questions apply equally well to men and women.)

How does he treat me? Is he respectful of my boundaries? Is he willing to let our friendship grow slowly? Is he kind and thoughtful? Is he able to express anger, sadness, and other difficult feelings appropriately? Does he have good listening skills? Is he able to negotiate? Is he serious about creating a long-term relationship?

How does she treat herself? Does she know what she wants? Has she spent at least a year of her adult life living alone? Does she know and take responsibility for meeting her own needs? Does she like and respect herself? Does she use alcohol and drugs responsibly? Is she reliable on the job? Does she weigh risks before taking them? Does she make good choices in friends? (How do her friends treat her?) Does she have a good support network? Has she ever gone for counseling to become more self-aware?

How does he describe past relationships? Has he had one or more serious relationships in the past? How long did they last? Does he speak of them positively or negatively, appreciatively or critically? Does he blame past partners for problems, or does he accept some responsibility? Is he still in touch with past partners? If so, are they friends or enemies?

What does she say about her family of origin? Does she remember childhood as a happy time? How did her parents treat each other? How did her parents treat the children? Was there emotional abuse in the home? Did family members observe appropriate boundaries? How did her parents set limits? What kind of relationship does she have with them now? How close was/is she to her siblings? How similar are your definition of family and hers?

Before you make a commitment, get to know any prospective candidate for your affections well. Try to postpone sexual intimacy until you have spent three months or more developing the friendship. Otherwise you may find it more complicated and unpleasant to end the relationship down the road if you need to move on.

Remember that, for the long term, in the words of the nineteenth-century writer Anna Sophie Swetchine, your challenge will be to “feel as one while remaining two.”