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DETERIORATION OF MARRIED RELATIONSHIPS: MOVING  
BEYOND AMBIVALENCE IN PHILIP ROTH'S *MY LIFE AS A MAN*

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**Abstract**

Ambivalence is a type of psychological imbalance in every human mind that causes several relationships breakdown in fictional as well as in our real life. The term ambivalence is originally a psychological term, taken from the German word *Ambivalenz*, propounded in 1910 by the Swiss psychologist Eugen Bleuler. Literally, ambivalence is a condition of uncertainty having synchronous clashing responses, convictions, or sentiments towards a few articles. In this research, ambivalence represents a multidimensional model of cognitive, affective, behavioral and social conflicts found in inter-personal relationships through Philip Roth's novel *My Life as a Man*. The most important relationship in this world is the husband-wife relationship as it is responsible for the outbid of the human race. Toby Antony in his article "Divorce pleas hit a record 3,122 in 2019" published in 'The New Indian Express', investigated that divorce pleas in Kochi, Kerala hit the record of 3,122 in 2019 which shows a trend of increasing divorces every year in comparison to 2,948 in 2018 and 2,576 in 2017. This is the data only of one city of India, other cities are also suffering from similar kinds. Even the developed countries are not lagging in this regard. The number of divorces granted in the UK in 1961 was 27,000. This doubled to 56,000 by 1969 and doubled to 125,000 divorces by 1972. The number in 2002 was 160,000. The deteriorating relationship of husband-wife day-by-day is a serious matter of concern to investigate its paramount causes through the psychoanalytical perspective and look for modulations for sustaining such relationships long-lasting. After analyzing the various factors, it is revealed in this research that ambivalent attitude is the paramount cause for degradation of this relationship culminating into divorces and separation. There is a human propensity to break the reality into polarities like good/bad or right/false and feelings like affection/antipathy, happiness/dolor, etc. It can be seen because, even unintentionally, people typically deal with the opposite of their knowledge. As literature is the mirror of society, so protagonists of Philip Roth's novel *My Life as a Man* Peter Tarnopol and Maureen are used for investigating and analyzing the issue of ambivalence in the destruction of relationships. This novel is based on unhappy and sterling wedding of Peter Tarnopol with Maureen Tarnopol. Maureen is the

talented young writer who all the way tries to be Peter's muse but proved herself to become his nemesis. Their partnership morally challenged one as being fraud-based. But the couple's friendship is so twisted that Peter is already attempting – and struggling – to liberate himself from it even after Maureen's demise. Philip Roth has developed a raging tragic stalemate between a man and a woman with his desperate innovations and scorching truths, flaws and shocking brutality. Finding ways to move beyond the ambivalence through fictional characters are done to develop various friendly relationships and nurturing and maintaining the existing relationships for a longer time. All relationships contain contradicting desires now and again; this is the quintessence of conflict. Furthermore, how often each individual relates to one end of polarity often defines the capacity to overcome conflict. Either participant creates habits to bring their partner near or drive them further. Every spouse plays a particular role in the battle against being in or out of the partnership, however, ultimate friction is generated between both partners by identifying themselves with one end of polarity.

**Keywords:** *Ambivalence, Relationship, Conflict, self, happiness, actualization.*

### **1. Introduction**

In interpersonal relations, ambivalence happens as the contrasting sensations and expectations of the other individual coexist, generating an uncertainty regarding being in the relationship. We unconsciously experience polarities such as love/hate, pleasure/sorry, positive/evil, right/evil and feelings. If we do not know, we should conclude that we always operate with the contrary of our facts. The possibility of split shapes our experience as we approach and become committed to our loved ones. We always respond “yes” to a “no” that reminds us of our decision.

If I say 'yes' to something wholeheartedly, I can feel the yes in every cell of my being. No, 'even if it is fleeting,' it has been taken into account and discarded and my, yes, 'is compatible with comfort.' If my try to say that it doesn't mess with my 'yes,' so reticence and fear and a residual awkward feeling can make me stop; I won't dedicate myself completely to 'yes.' Because not only does my perception describe the opposite polarity, but my experience will also be affected by the degree to which I have absorbed it into my consciousness. When we are caught in two polarities, and unable to balance them, ambivalence may be assumed to exist.

### **2. Ambivalence and Conflict**

At times, both partnerships involve conflicting desires; this is the existence of conflict. How spouses deal with tension between them can influence the degree to which both ends of the polarity are conscious or concealed. The capacity to overcome disputes can also be calculated by the extent by which each individual associates with one end of polarity. If I'm sweet and not able to accept I'm unnatural, my psyche's unnatural dimensions may become dormant and drain energy from being kind. In my goodwill and the unbelief of my partner, I cannot be completely present or sincere. By becoming strongly associated with one end of

polarity and by suppressing the intolerable vector awareness, we cannot be totally present. If all persons in a partnership therefore identify their personality, what they build between them would often be an unwillingness to accept such interactions and find it impossible to settle conflicts.

### **3. Ambivalence as a Chronic Pattern**

The nature of ambivalence is the reluctance to address an intrinsic dispute which leads to a mutual form of transmitting lack of presence and uncertainty. In all partnerships, ambivalence and uncertainty can be transient states, as we take time to address conflicting or new evidence. However, uncertainty may become a defensive posture that prevents one from being completely present as ambivalence becomes a chronic reaction to the environment. Our sense of helplessness is supported by the regular expressions of confusion over what we want or need. "I don't know," neither gives us the feeling of superiority of our environment, nor gives our companion something to move on with. This hopelessness is compounded by the reality that the partner cannot move into the partnership or get closer to it. This recurring trend becomes a challenge in relationships because deeper communication is prevented.

In relationships where partner uncommitted and partner undesirable engagement is established, a recurring pattern in ambivalence generates typically a variable. In an effort to draw their partner together, or drive them apart, each partner may establish patterns around this tension. Every partner expresses a clear role in the disagreement of being in or out of the relationship, but by being associated with one end of the polarity, all spouses ultimately establish an ambivalent dynamic between them. That suggests that if we condensed this to a simple yes and no, the two ends of a polarity will be "yes, I want more with you" and "no, I don't want more with you" Either couples are yes or no, and they are stalled. We may assume that either party has not settled its own internal ambivalence such that either party cannot commit itself or is not completely engaged in this dynamic with the other. The other one will show a deeper desire for the partnership, and the 'certainty' displayed by the devoted partner is to live alone in reaction to a greater isolation from the other.

There is an atmosphere in which the pair are uncertain and volatile, because ambivalence drives the person and the relationship in opposite directions. There would be an aura of impending catastrophe and a breakdown of the partnership. At times, pairs even separate or threaten to split up. The bond assumes the characteristics of an emotional roller coaster as time progresses, which alternates between confidence and disintegration. It may be really challenging for both partners to be themselves and to be accessible to each other in this setting. Something that one of them believes will contribute to the partnership being discarded or continued if it is going to fail at any point. It induces alienation, since each spouse maintains aspects of him/herself and hence

raises confusion regarding the possibility of separation. This is evolving into a deadly loop.

The spouse who displays participation typically feels hurt and isolated by the other partner. In expecting to raise the other person's desire to proceed, the feeling that they are not strong enough for the other person to fully commit to them triggers a reflection that he needs to fulfil. The partner who gives more confusion is also not able to offer more, and finds it challenging to convey his true feelings. Try projecting how the other person responds and retains thoughts, perceptions and instincts whether they believe that the other individual reacts to them negatively. The arrangement thus becomes more immoral.

In a relationship where the couples don't want to be together, simultaneously it is possible that they cannot give up either of them. This is the essence of ambivalence. The concern for separation is the source of the anxiety upon which the partnership sits, either in need of further separation or in fear of separation. This dilemma implies a relationship with any individual; it is not a shelter and a protection, but a place of deprivation. It's short-lived, but both couples will have fun and feel linked while they are irritated and powerless. It takes a long time and energy to deal with this innate fear and poverty.

#### **4. Moving Beyond Ambivalence**

The secret to the sustained duration of ambivalence is to solve internal tensions, so that you do not take actions, make decisions, articulate your senses and remain really active. Relationship, marriage and separation are often essential to an ambivalent position. To be here is to understand the vulnerability and flaws of creation, to go with it and to be lost in the following moment.

We need to appreciate love; we need to be able to educate, to create, to foresee or to fear and despise the world. In his *Motivation and Personality* (1954), Abraham Maslow said "Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence". Humans need not only to belong and interact, but they also need to feel as if they are making a positive effect on other people's lives. A big road to a life of greater well-being, vitality, purpose, and development as a whole is to contain the chances to give love to someone with whom we do not yet have direct communication with or feel a personal bond, irrespective of a way to become more relaxed. Shirley Anne Cameron mentions the views of Claire Nuer, a Holocaust, survivor of terminal cancer, and personal mastery visionary survivor; in her project *Narrative Writing for Adolescent Development* as, "The only way to create love, safety, and acceptance is by giving them." Here is a problem. If association and association are truly security conditions, those interested in high-quality partnerships can be gratified with love, no longer have love in their lives, be happy with love and no longer experience or communicate love. Maslow emphasised that while love is studied in theoretical documentation and textbooks, the subject often reflects on love as a weakness: "The love needs as ordinarily studied . . . is a deficit need. It is a

hole which has to be filled, an emptiness into which love is poured. . . . Intermediate states of pathology and health follow upon intermediate states of thwarting or satiation." He acknowledged, though, that we are more inclined to turn our love outward after a certain point of love fulfilment. "needing love" was clearly separated from "unneeding love" by Maslow and referred to the "needing love" as D-love (love of deficiency) and the "unneeding love" as B-love ("love of being of another"). Although D-love may be gratified, as Maslow observed, the entire concept of satisfaction should not apply to B-love. All those with B-love roles need not be handled, even in "steady, little maintenance doses and they could even spend time without them." Instead of desire, the b-love usually spreads instead of vanishing instead of looking for fulfilment. As a consequence, since it is naturally desirable, B-love is generally a more satisfying experience (not necessary as a way to any other end). Instead of lust, B-love admires, and B-love typically expands rather than disappears instead of seeking fulfilment. As a consequence, B-love is a more fun and desirable experience (not necessary as a way to any other end). Maslow wrote: 'Far from the shadow of a doubt, B-love is a rich, 'better,' more worthwhile and emotional feeling than D-love, which all B-lovers have already encountered before.' B-love is close to the idea of "real love" that Buddhist meditation professor Sharon Salzberg defines as the innate potential that we all must love every day. Life is a free gift, according to Salzberg, and we all have deep pools of affection, which we can still join to make our lives more love. Erich Fromm, similarly, asserts that "mature love is an aggressive process, not a passive one; an attitude, not a feeling", in his book *The Art of Loving*. He further adds "The beauty of seeing love as a mentality, or an orientation towards another, is that before behaving lovingly towards them, you don't have to wait until you have a "positive resonance" with another user. This is why I think it is important to separate B-love from the need for attachment. (Chapter 2). As one's self matures and another's interests become so essential, one eventually changes the meaning of love from "being loved" to "love," from a condition of dependence in which one is recompensed to be loved to a relational orientation in which the entirety of the universe can be loved. Fromm writes, "Infantile love follows the principle: 'I love because I am loved.' Mature love follows the principle 'I am loved because I love.' Immature love says, 'I love you because I need you.' Contrast to it mature love says, 'I need you because I love you.'" A mature framing of love as "need-free love" has exceptional consequences for the wellbeing and development of an individual, as the existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom observes. People frequently complain of depression in psychotherapy, which they often attribute to being "unloved" and "unlovable." However, Yalom suggests that the most powerful emotional development is always accomplished in the opposite realm: one's inability to be romantic. As Yalom points out, "Love is a mindset rather than a real experience." More often than not, the problem of not being loved is a problem of not caring.

The Secret Ego Self may be our strongest tool, but it may also be the deadliest enemy of ours. In the one side, in order to accomplish our goals, the inherent human capacity for self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-control is necessary. The self, on the other hand, has an everlasting need to be viewed in a favourable way. In order to disavow blame for any bad result associated with it, the self would do something. In order to see the self in a clearer light as the "ego," the defensive strategies can be collectively summarised. In the contemporary time, a research programme for "quiet selves" based on the concepts of Buddhist philosophy and humanistic psychology has been developed by social psychologist Heidi Wayment and her colleagues and funded by e-philosophy. "a self-zoo of self-defence mechanisms. In order to see the self in a stronger light as the "ego," it is easy to collectively sum up the defensive strategies. In recent years, a "quiet self" research programme focused on Buddhist theory and principles of humanistic psychology and supported by observational research in the field of positive psychology has been developed by cognitive psychologist Heidi Wayment and her colleagues. Focused on self-confidence, interdependency and cautious experience, the quiet-ego method focuses on mitigating one's needs and on promoting one's and others' progress over time. Paradoxically, ego quietness is much more effective than focusing on self-enhancement in the pursuit of welfare, development, well-being, competition and a healthy self-esteem. B-loving individuals are far more likely to be the following four closely linked facets of the silent ego which can be created by each of us.

### **5. Disconnected Consciousness**

There is an engaged, non-defensive type of commitment to the present moment for those with a quiet ego. They are conscious of both the positive and negative aspects of a situation, and their thoughts are distracted from the more ego-driven options of the contemporary moment. Instead, they try to see reality as clearly as possible. In this moment, this implies honesty and recognition of anything you can find for yourself or for others, because time to become a silent ego is obviously not the same as a spoken ego. Of necessity, a big part of understanding as much as possible. It also requires the opportunity to re-examine already evolved ideas and emotions, examine them more deeply than one would have been able to do at the moment, and make the requisite changes that would lead to more progress.

### **6. Inclusive Identity**

There is a healthy or more integrative interpretation of oneself and others in people whose egos are shut down in length. In such a sense that they can interact with the experiences of other individuals, break down tension and achieve a greater view of society, they take diverse perspectives into consideration. If our identity is egalitarian, rather than functioning just to support ourself, we are likely to be cooperative and caring for others. Especially during times of tension, where our core beliefs are questioned, we should always listen to the other point of view and learn more from the

individual. And if what we've heard is how much we really believe from our own point of view; we still treat the person first like a human being.

### **7. Perspective-Taking**

The silent ego takes focus outside of itself by focusing on other points of view, growing empathy and sympathy. Perspective-taking and inclusive identity, since either one may cause the other, are interconnected. It can, for instance, promote a greater understanding of their experience and consider what you share with others in general.

### **8. Mindedness Growth**

Turning the knob back on one's ego creates a personal developmental mentality as well. The possibility of prosocial behaviour is increased by the optimism of getting stronger with the period, as it encourages one at the moment to examine the long-term implications of their decisions and view the current moment as part of an incremental course of life, rather than as a chance of one's own existence. A quiet ego is probably not the same as a silent ego. When the ego is shattered so badly that it lacks its identity, no one favours it. Instead, the invisible ego experience emphasises unity and incorporation. Scott Barry Kaufman (2018) put the idea of Wayment and her friends as, "The volume of the ego is turned down so that it might listen to others as well as the self in an effort to approach life more humanely and compassionately." The aim of the silent ego method is not to give up your sense of value or neglect your self-esteem needs, but to take a less negative and more integrative attitude towards yourself and others. A real identity that includes others may be completely formed without losing oneself or having the need for superficial shows of dominance.

### **9. Husband-Wife Relationship in Philip Roth's *My Life as a Man***

Protagonist Peter Tarnopol is the male protagonist of the novel who married with Maureen. Maureen is kind of passionate and possessive women who has high desire for marriage. Peter is motivated by the fear that if he does not marry Maureen, she will do herself in, "And that was unthinkable-I could not be the cause of another's death" (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 193). Further, by proposing before Maureen knew that test results, Peter could appear as their union might have some chance of success. Wrong again!

Maureen is so overjoyed and, in her turn, so taken in by the apparent sincerity of the proposal that she agrees to an abortion. That leads to her second deception, an action she performs with consummate skill, when she pretends to have had the surgery and returns to the apartment evidently shaking with illness and fatigue. All this is in behalf of getting Peter to assume his "manly" duty, the course Maureen maintains even as the marriage fails, a separation is arranged, and Peter is saddled with financially crippling alimony.

Tarnopol has wanted to experience reality in all its obduracy and intractability, expecting it to “take place at an appropriately lofty moral altitude, an elevation somewhere, say, between *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Wings of the Dove*” (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 194). Ironically, he gets intractability, all right, but instead of the intractability of serious fiction he gets the intractability of soap opera: “Resistant enough, but the wrong genre” (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 195). The soap opera he and Maureen play out lasts for several more years, until her sudden death (as with Roth’s wife) in an automobile accident. Many of the scenes are indeed operatic, inspiring comedy amidst pathos, such as Maureen’s revelation during a suicide attempt of how she deceived Peter with the urine test (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 208-10). On another occasion years afterward, when Maureen has steadfastly refused to divorce him, insisting that he return to her and be “a man” (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 268), she again deceives Peter into thinking she has relented. But it is only another ploy, one that ends in violence and disaster for them both (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 274)

By this time, having broken down completely, Peter is in the care of Dr. Spielvogel. Unlike the Dr. Spielvogel in *Portnoy’s Complaint*, this Spielvogel is a developed character, one who participates significantly in its action-and in his humor. Again wit is operative, as in description of Spielvogel three years after Tarnopol casually meets him at a social gathering. Both men have changed: while Tarnopol was battling Maureen, Spielvogel was battling cancer. Among the shameful secrets Peter confesses are his brief transvestitism (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 210), his habit of leaving his sperm around in people’s houses and on library books (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 211), and his total unmaning-or so it seems to him-by Maureen (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 213).

Literally crying for help, Tarnopol puts himself in Dr. Spielvogel’s hands-only to be invited to consider how much Maureen may remind him of his mother. The question throws Tarnopol back: “Psychoanalytic reductivism was not going to save me from the IRT tracks,” he feels (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 213). Nevertheless, he allows Spielvogel to pursue the issue further, much further, until he all but accepts the hypothesis of a “phallic threatening mother” (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 216) and begins treating his adoring, amazed, and terribly hurt parent with coldness and disdain (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 218). Spielvogel questions Tarnopol’s happy childhood, suggesting a sinister aspect underlying his mother’s “competence and vigor and attentiveness,” which have led to his patient’s “castration anxiety” (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 214). Roth here not only satirizes Freudian theories of childhood development; he opposes to it an interesting and humorous theory of his own. The trouble with “Mrs. Tarnopol’s little boy” was not threatening behaviour but just the opposite: in Peter she had nourished the belief that he could win whatever he wanted, that he led a “charmed life.” Thus, unprotected against “the realities of setback and frustration” (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 215), he was totally unprepared for Maureen. This theory also explains Peter’s astonishment when he learns about the urine trick and his



difficulty in turning it into fiction: Most likely the reason he could not make it seem credible is that he could hardly believe it himself-"HOW COULD SHE?" he thinks. "TO ME!" (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 208).

Later Spielvogel attempts to convince Tarnopol that he is essentially narcissistic. The issue arises when Spielvogel writes an article entitled "Creativity: The Narcissism of the Artist" for a professional journal with a small circulation. The essay is what Tarnopol, enraged, regards as thinly veiled portrait of himself. He confronts his therapist, and for several sessions they argue about the essay. Spielvogel forcefully takes the position that he had every right to do what he did, since he was writing a scientific paper. Moreover, he maintains that Tarnopol's anger and distress are the result of his ambivalent attitude about his own "specialness" (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 249) and of the blow the article delivers to his narcissism (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 251). Tarnopol retorts that Spielvogel should have asked his permission before revealing confidential information; the difference between a novelist who because he writes fiction does not ask permission and a psychoanalyst who writes a scientific article is serious and significant: "It's in the nature of being a novelist to make private life public-that's a part of what a novelist is up to. But certainly, it is not what I thought *you* were up to when I came here" (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 250).

The impasse they reach leads Spielvogel to propose ending treatment, but Tarnopol is still too dependent upon his therapist. In the course of the episode he reveals something important about the nature of fiction, specifically the writing of novels, that bears directly on what Roth is doing in *My Life as a Man*: "himself," Tarnopol says, "is to many a novelist what his own physiognomy is to a painter of portraits: the closest subject at hand demanding scrutiny, a problem for his art to solve-given the enormous obstacles to truthfulness, the artistic problem," Neither the novelist nor the portrait painter is a narcissist, because success depends on powers of detachment, on "de-narcissizing" oneself. "That's where the excitement comes in," Tarnopol says. "That hard conscious work that makes it art!" (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 240).

Regarding the "truth" of fiction, it matters little whether or not Roth's therapist (he had one at the time) wrote an article such as Spielvogel's. What does matter is that the article, real or imagined, provides Roth with an opportunity to raise questions about creativity and narcissism and about the relation between the two. Through Tarnopol Roth presents the strongest possible arguments a character like Peter can conceive. At the same time he presents powerful counterarguments through the character of Spielvogel. The "truth" will emerge not necessarily in the arguments of one or the other but partly through the dialectic that develops and partly through the evidence the rest of the novel presents.

The fact is that, despite Tarnopol's vehement refusal to accept Spielvogel's diagnosis of his narcissism, much in his behaviour confirms the

diagnosis. That is an essential aspect of Roth's comedy. Tarnopol may be justly upset about Spielvogel's article: The psychiatrist had no right to present information about his patient that could easily reveal his identity to a knowledgeable reader. But Tarnopol errs in vigorously denying a basic element of his character, his inordinate preoccupation with himself. By his own admission that quality was fostered in him from his earliest years; then it was violently challenged by Maureen, a competitor for his attention—the most demanding one he has ever known. Her jealousy is the observe of his narcissism, resulting in their basic incompatibility. Matters then worsen when she begins to fancy herself a competitor as a writer of fiction to boot. Roth knows that the artistic problem involves getting the proper distance, or detachment, from his subject, particularly when his subject is himself. That is not only where the “excitement comes in” but also where the fun begins. And it has led Roth, as it will later lead Zuckerman (in *Zuckerman Unbound*, for example), into problems of trying to disentangle himself from his fiction. *Portnoy's Complaint* borrowed from Roth's boyhood to present certain aspects of Newark during the war years and of middle-class Jewish home life; as a result, many readers wrongly began to make wholesale one-to-one equivalences regarding Alexander Portnoy and Philip Roth. In *My Life as a Man* Roth fictionalizes his martial experience and attempts, through the device of the “Useful Fictions, to forewarn the reader against similar equivalences. To the extent that the reader observes and registers the point, Roth is successful. Nevertheless, readers can be notoriously unobservant, and a vulgar curiosity for gossip can become overwhelming, especially when offered such tantalizing bait as this novel offers. For, as Spielvogel points out, Peter is just the kind of man who would interpret Susan's action as his responsibility rather than her own. Peter had earlier interpreted Maureen's suicide attempt the same way, much to her derision (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 127). A confirmed narcissist, he naturally sees events the only way he can, and against the available contrary evidence, such as that which Spielvogel brings to bear. The next morning, Susan knew her purifying wife planned and had a key to let herself in, but she would be discovered within a few hours. She did what she did to get what she wanted, to get Peter to come running. And Spielvogel reminds Tarnopol, “You did come running. And you are running yet. Maybe only in circles, but that for her is still better than out of her life completely. It is you; you see who is blowing this up out of all proportion. Your narcissism again, if I may say so. Much too much overestimation of—well, practically everything” (Roth, *My Life as a Man* 222). Nevertheless, Tarnopol uses this incident, coupled with that involving the “Creativity article earlier, to break off therapy and go into isolation again.

## 10. Conclusion

The process of being a whole human being is a continual journey of exploration, transparency, and confidence, through which we achieve greater and higher degrees of equilibrium and reconciliation between ourself and the outside world, helping us to become who we really want and becoming more

flexible and stable. As we are in a state of transition at all times, we are still in a state of being. There are some basic values that will act as a safe framework for our own personal path to becoming a whole person. : accept our whole self, not just our best self, learn to trust ourself, become aware of our inner conflicts, look out for lopsided development, create the best version of ourself, strive for growth, not happiness and finally harness the power of our dark side. These magical elements have the ability to keep ourselves away from ambivalence and we can splendidly maintain some healthier relationships in our life.

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