

Relative Values: Professor Steven Pinker, psychologist, and his wife, the philosopher and novelist Rebecca Newberger Goldstein; Professor Steven Pinker, 61, one of the world's leading authorities on the mind, and his wife, the philosopher and novelist Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, 66, on guilt, divorce and being "soul-naked"

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Body

- Steven on Rebecca: Her copies of Spinoza's Ethics and William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience are so tattered, she keeps them in bags, but she won't replace them
- Rebecca on Steven: I call him a rational obsessive. An example: he's a serious cyclist and to keep his bike as light as possible he weighs everything on it, including his water

I first heard of Rebecca after her first novel, *The Mind-Body Problem*, was published in 1983. I was dazzled by her writing: it was so brilliant, funny and humane, and all the rage among academics. Many years later, a publisher asked me to blurb her third novel, *The Dark Sister*, and she got in touch.

Our first couple of meetings over coffee in 2001 were pleasant and stimulating, but sparks didn't fly. It wasn't until a couple of years later that we discovered not only did we have many intellectual interests in common, but we saw the world through similar lenses.

We were passionate about the same things, and had comparable temperaments. Doesn't sound romantic, but for people like us, intellectual issues are romantic. I couldn't be with someone who wasn't passionate about ideas.

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Rebecca is so thoughtful and clever that she could be intimidating, but I'd call it inviting. We'd both grown up Jewish: I was born in Montreal, she in New York. Neither of us was a believer in God, yet we each saw the universe in the same way. But if you don't subscribe to any religion, where does that leave morality ... is it deeper than convention?

Over tea one day, she provided the answer. As soon as you engage with another person, there's a behavioural symmetry. I just knew she was someone who could stimulate my intellectual horizons.

I'd been married twice before. My two divorces were by far the darkest interludes in my life; I reached depths of misery I hope I never experience again. I was lonely, and the fact I was hurting someone else overwhelmed me with sadness and guilt.

So marriage was a leap for both Rebecca and me, but I knew it would work. Love overcame me. Like the rock songs say: "I loved the way she walked and talked." I couldn't stop thinking about her. I adored her individuality. I was just so fortunate that she saw something in me. I came out of the closet as a defender of reason and objectivity - for Rebecca, there's something heroic about trying to find out how the universe really works.

Rebecca and I both have highly agreeable temperaments and I think that's one of the keys to our happiness. We both know when to be silent, to give each other time to think and ponder - it's crucial because we're both introverted.

I knew that stepchildren were a big source of friction in second marriages [Rebecca has two daughters, Yael, 38, and Danielle, 31] and I vowed I would never make Rebecca choose where to allocate her affection. I didn't have kids in my first or second marriages, but I can't regret that because this feels so much like family. Right now I feel so fortunate that it would be cosmically ungrateful to regret anything.

Rebecca: When I was 18 I married the first man I spoke to, so I never left home to go to college, never lived in a dorm. My husband was a good man: he was the first person to tell me I was smart. That wasn't often said to girls who grew up in the kind of strict religious household I did.

He encouraged me to study, but the sexual revolution passed me by. When other girls were dating, I was making the Sabbath every weekend. It wasn't that I was out of the game, I was never in the game in the first place.

I had just come out of this long marriage when I met Steven and I was enjoying being on my own. The last thing I wanted was another long-term relationship.

Evolutionary psychology was completely new to me and I had lots of good arguments about why it wasn't really scientific, but Steven's book, *How the Mind Works*, completely won me over. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say he reached deep into my core and changed the way I thought.

pullquoteSteven thought he was the world's greatest introvert ... until he met me

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In 1996, I won the MacArthur Fellowship [the so-called "genius grant", awarded annually in America]. It's a big deal, something like \$200,000 a year, for five years, no strings attached. I could have gone to a beach for five years, but instead I moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to be near my elder daughter, who was studying at Harvard, and to write a novel about physics, which I never would have written had I not had that support.

While I was there I kept thinking: "Hmm, I might run into Steven Pinker." I'm an extreme introvert - I never make overtures - but I sent him a postcard, something I'd never done. So we met, and he was so delightful, so not full of himself - one thing I cannot take is pomposity. He was sweet and gallant and that mattered so much more than the brilliance.

Things moved very, very slowly. He thought he was the world's greatest introvert until he met me. People who know us are amazed we ever got it together at all. I'm an idiot when it comes to romance. I don't need people, neither does he. But we realised eventually we did need each other. When I'm working on a novel, he likes me to read out the pages I've written that day. It's an intimacy I'd never experienced before, or even thought I'd want. It makes me feel soul-naked, but I love it.

When we first met, he thought I was formidably intellectual, I thought he was someone who would not crowd me out. What I absolutely know about him after seven years together is that he's the most trustworthy man you could hope to meet.

Although I intellectualise a lot, I'm very emotional. And here I go, crying already ... Steven is a person of complete integrity. Professors Goldstein and Pinker are visiting professors at New College of the Humanities, London WC1; nchlondon.ac.uk

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