



Love & Attachments

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“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

--Corinthians

Love is such a strong, curious and conflicting emotion. We can feel it within a breath's or an ocean's distance of another. It can drive us to perform disastrous or magnanimous acts in its name. It can be our *raison d'être* or our greatest heartbreak. It is a universal aim for much of our happiness and well-being. It can make us feel desired and relieve us of the pain of isolation. Love can be a physical and sexual response to those we feel captivated by or an attraction created by our subconscious minds. Those with more spiritual leanings believe it is found in destiny, fate, karma or soul mates. No matter what our leanings, most of us harbour certain sacredness around love and its mysteries, quandaries and ephemeral nature.

Family:

Is blood thicker than water?

Depending on the influences you grew up with, your beliefs about the importance of family may vary. In pluralistic cultures, decisions are often first based on how they will affect the family whereas in individualistic cultures, the individual is considered before the family or community. Believing that one must love or be loyal to one's family no matter what can be very conflicting or reassuring depending on your perspective. Being able to unquestioningly rely on another can be very comforting but being entangled with troubled or offensive individuals can prove very taxing and oppressive.

Alternatively, being on your own and blazing every trail of life from scratch can be a very solitary and thorny experience. Being part of a tribe and benefitting from the group's resources can relieve many of our needs. Striking a balance is ideal but not always possible. Sometimes we need to create a family of our own choosing and love the rest as they are, even if that means challenging the beliefs of our community.

Conflicted love:

Those who grew up without unconditional nurturance and guidance are essentially taught to fear love. They may unknowingly pick relationships where they are sure to be let down or they may try to keep their distance altogether - perhaps seeking solace in work, substances, or other distractions. Some seek fulfillment solely with animals, providers of unconditional regard, rather than risk the pains of intimacy or loneliness. In any case, this is an incredibly painful experience especially as this is often out of reach of their awareness and all they know is there is something missing or hurting in their lives. Sadly they may also have learned to attribute these shortfalls to themselves instead of knowing that they are innately loveable and are capable of learning to have healthy love in their lives.

Our relationships with our guardians are some of the most potent, life-forming relationships we will ever have. They teach us how to relate to the world from a time before our logical brain was fully formed so that much of this information is held within us on a hidden level. It drives us and makes decisions for us without our knowing. This is why some people continually find themselves in relationships where they are conflicted, confused, in pain and asking themselves, “Why?” Where we grew up with overly enmeshed parents, our

ability to successfully form bonds with others is affected and we may find ourselves in brambly relationships. Where a parent withheld emotionally, we may repeat relationships with emotionally unavailable people and true intimacy may be uncomfortable or scary.

For some troubled souls, being in love can seem akin to asking someone to hang on to a deep, dark secret. Others think they have to trick someone into loving them because they believe they are innately unlovable. Still others believe love has to corral them like a wild horse and rule over them like a master that they may rebel against from time to time (much similar to the teen-parent dynamic). We may still be influenced by our sleepy subconscious but in choosing a mate we can at least consciously endeavour to choose someone who knows him or herself and is willing to do the work required. The same applies to us as well.

Idyllic love:

Idyllic love is a pursuit of a fantasy in a way. The object of their love can be completely unavailable, unrealistic or inappropriate: a spirit-hero on a pedestal. The smitten one is convinced that the love is pure and true and often can't seem to move past it. They hope for perfect love to replace what they never had but really it is only a castle in the sky and their love isn't reciprocated. Hopefully they can learn to seek a more down-to-earth love and work through the need for (or loss of) the fantasy.

The “male” and “female” energies:

Certain portions of our societies have a traditional and outdated view about male and female characteristics. There's the ‘strong’ role, which is limited to strength, stability, logic, and generally an ability to hold it together at all times. Failure to meet any of these in any way is a failure to be ‘masculine’ or ‘strong’



- an overly rigid structure for being. Then there are the other outdated characteristics of being weak, unstable, and emotionally nonsensical - certainly not a respected package. These so-called 'male' and 'female' traits can be found in both genders. Both may struggle with being 'emotional' but wanting to be 'strong'. Expressing love can feel like failing to remain strong (by being vulnerable; revealing emotions; or being needy) and consequently can be powerfully difficult or painful. An imbalance creates obstructions to knowing and expressing oneself in a genuine fashion and impedes fulfilling relationships. A balance of the two energies can be healthful and less limiting. Being strong is to be openly emotional at appropriate times and places while maintaining a sense of equilibrium, self-nurturing, self-respect and healthy boundaries.

The art of love... is largely the art of persistence.
~Albert Ellis

Codependent love:

Codependent love is falling in love with a perceived 'project' - a 'fixer-upper'. They fall in love with those who aren't good for them and the love isn't reciprocated - certainly in any unconditional and wholesome fashion. They are addicted to those who are unavailable in some meaningful way or appear to need rescuing. They become a kind of parent and overly responsible for the other - excessively controlling and overly tuned in to the other's feelings. They are mirroring their childhood with an unreliable or irresponsible parent (such as an alcoholic) where the child stepped into a parental role. In recreating this scenario as an adult they are subconsciously recreating the relationship they had with their parent. They attempt to repair what happened vicariously through this new individual in the hopes of gaining the love or parent they never had. They become addicted to chaos and misery as a means of avoiding their own self and emotions (much like the addict). They also recreate a deep, dark belief that they are not worthy of respect or functional love.

The idea of "love thy enemies" confuses people because there's a kind of admiration for those who accept everyone - it's almost saintly. Such reasoning can be used to justify maintaining a tumultuous

relationship. Some people feel they are not entitled to verbalize their dissatisfaction with their relationship and that doing so means they are bad people who will not be loved or that they have failed as the self-imposed "rescuer". "Love thy enemies" is a fabulous sentiment in that it implies that no one is less worthy of love than another but we can offer love without involving ourselves directly and causing ourselves harm. When it hurts us, we may be failing to love ourselves. Loving someone who isn't helping themselves is not helping.



Jealousy:

Some people didn't learn how to share people in relationships and jealousy is often a factor. Being "in love" can bring about possessiveness - a sense that you belong to me. Such individuals are also often terrified of abandonment. Just as when we were children we went through a phase of saying, "Mine! Mine!" so too we go through this in an intimate relationship. It's important to learn to grow beyond this and accept that people can and do move away from us much as we need to do ourselves when necessary. Temporary absence does not mean we are unloved or replaceable.

Jealousy also has a footing in insecurity. For those who mentally compare themselves to others and find themselves failing (or, more egotistically, superior) there is no sense of self-acceptance or acceptance of others. So, "others" become a constant source of fear. Insecure people believe their beloved will obviously leave for someone better. This can be infuriating for the partner as their love and loyalty is constantly questioned - often undeservedly. If this isn't corrected, often the offended partner may get fed up and either leave or actually find another so that they can at least enjoy the deed they're being accused of.

Relationship-bound:

Dependent people believe they need others to accompany them, make decisions for them, protect them, and take

care of them. They are terrified of living on their own. These individuals do not understand their capacities and are terrified of abandonment. In many cases, their parent's extreme fear of loss caused the parent to subconsciously use them to make the parent feel secure - never giving the child the sense that it is okay to venture out on their own.

In extreme cases this can be found in individuals who can't even move out of the house. Some relationship-bound people may alternatively believe that "you're nobody unless somebody loves you" - another myth.

Some believe that love is "fated" or "destined" and if you find that soul mate you have no choice but to be together. Such thinking removes any question of being free from the relationship and relieves them of the responsibility of autonomy. It's a fallacy of course. Falling in love immediately creates a sense of freedom from isolation but a balanced relationship includes autonomy. Not having a sense of mastering these boundaries creates conflict.

The logical one:

The logical individual has very little room for love or emotion. They often lack attunement to how others feel and are more concerned with logic even when it causes harm. Their childhood environment may have been one where emotions ran rampant and terrorized members of the household so 'logic' became a safe alternative. This 'logical approach' can be a type of anxiety developed to defend against painful emotions providing them with a false sense of security. The difficulties with the logical individual is getting them to see the value in abandoning their safe-haven (logic) and embracing the ambiguous but intimate world of emotions.

Erotic:

Lust. Sex. Hubba-hubba. Well, by now most of you have heard that sex is not love. Sex is not a guaranteed promise or indication of love. It can be entirely separate with no future in love. However, many still treat sex as if it were love or assures love. Sex, in itself, can be a whole other complicated subject with just as many behaviours and tendencies both positive and negative. It can certainly be a part of a loving relationship or a means of expressing love but it can also be an addiction, a means of escape, a form of solace, an adventure, a way of communicat-

ing, a mask, an act of violence or power or an act of duty. Pay attention and try to discern the different messages.

Negative stroking:

Teasing, jibes and joking put-downs are very common amongst those who are somewhat uncomfortable with intimacy. By reaching out and pressing someone's buttons, even in fun, such individuals manage to feel some closeness without the discomfort or fear of reprisal from peers. A common behaviour but if used exclusively is an indication of deeper intimacy anxieties.

Attachment disorders:

Attachments are the types of bonds we form with others. We usually all have some kind of attachment behaviour - something we have learned from the relationships we had or witnessed while growing up and we tend to repeat these relationship patterns as adults. Attachment disorders are disruptions in people's abilities to form healthy, trusting, respectful, and loving relationships. If you keep finding yourself in difficult relationships it is possible to get help; learn about the roots of such issues and make changes for the better.

"In love":

Now there's a head burn conversation! "I don't know if I'm 'in love' with you or if I just love you." Call me when you figure that out. But seriously, this can be an epic quandary for many individuals. It is usually a struggle for both people. It can be hurtful and confusing to be on the receiving end of that quandary. It is a worthwhile dialogue to have but be careful about throwing that sentence around time and time again. It can also be an indication of your ability or readiness to love. Perhaps you are repeating a pattern of keeping a relationship on edge - pushing away and inviting back over and over. Perhaps you are placing too much weight on the other person's ability to "make you happy". Just be careful about taking your partner along for the ride. Try to sort that out within yourself.

Unconditional love:

This is the love we are seeking and needing and it does exist and can be found. Many of us learned about conditional love as children. If we were well behaved, quiet and polite then we'd

get approving smiles and complimentary tones but if we drew on the wall with crayons, that love was quickly replaced with anger and punishment. But it is the behaviour that is disapproved of not the person. Instead of saying, "Bad girl or boy", the parent can discuss the specific behaviour but the girl or boy is still intrinsically good and loveable. Conditional love says, "I love how you make me feel or what you do for me". Unconditional love says, "I love you as you are". Unconditional love isn't something we have to "buy" with what we do or say or by how we look. Unconditional love does not give ultimatums or ask that we change our basic nature. Unconditional

"Come live in my heart and pay no rent"

- Samuel Lover

love is accepting. You don't have to act a certain way or do things for people or look a certain way in order to be worthy of love. You're human and therefore loveable.

Self-love:

To be able to offer healthful love, self-love is vital. If you don't believe you are loveable, no amount of love thrust upon you will convince you otherwise and you will only be giving your future love-bunny a never-ending project of reassuring you. It is by no means someone else's job to make you feel loveable - this is work you need to do yourself. Be aware of expecting others to give you something you won't even give yourself. This means working on your self-esteem, valuing and fulfilling your needs and learning self-nurturing and self-soothing.

Define love in your terms:

You can choose for yourself what love is. Select what you desire and to whom you choose to give love to. Remember that being loved does not make you loveable - it only validates that you are loveable. You need not be bound

by conventional rules but know that convention can influence others. Know that as an adult we are entirely responsible for our own happiness. Try to choose people that have the willingness to work on things and know themselves. Be willing to know yourself and work through challenges.

Last word:

Love surrounds, surprises and confounds us. Someone could love you right now and you might never know. It is fascinating that even if we don't have it, we still know about it. As we gain and lose people and grow older love changes or maybe switches between people. Sometimes, through resolve or resolution, we recover love with someone. People drag each other through the proverbial mud many times and yet still come back to love. We can still love someone who deeply hurts, shames or angers us - albeit a difficult task - and it can be even harder to love someone to whom we have committed the same peccadillo. Even receiving love can be hard. It's a leap of faith to let someone love us and risk being revealed or hurt and worse rejected for all that we are. In the end, it is an ephemeral, magical, immeasurable and scientifically undetectable sensation that we are only aware of through words and actions. It holds the power of the universe in its centre and we are only left with our abilities to hopefully feel it in all its wild richness, recover from it when it wounds, and carry it with us to the ends of our lives. What other experience is so invisible and so commanding?

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