



CELL 47

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## Love

### Possessive versus Unselfish

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**DOORS TO YOUR HEART**

*Accustom yourself continually to make many acts of love,  
for they enkindle and melt the soul.*

ST. THERESA OF AVILA

**LOVE TRANSFORMS LIFE.** Our love grows richer as we move from conditional to conscious love, and with luck, sometimes even transcendent love.

Love is an uncalculated gift of the heart that brings poetry and magic into surroundings that seemed drab and dreary. In love, your heart sings even though there is no music. It's an opening of your being in which you give deeply of yourself. As souls touch, life feels energized and joyful.

Love is not, however, all violins and roses. To feel the exploding attraction or warm glow of love when it fills you is easy. To keep its magic alive can take some effort. And falling in love involves risk, since you can't be sure where your path will ultimately take you. Most of us don't know where we will or won't find love of any quality, and sometimes even when we've found it, we're still not sure if we have it. And we may be afraid to open up to love because of painful memories from the past. In the midst of passionate romance, knowing that you are becoming vulnerable to unknown forces as you dive naked into the unpredictable currents of love can be frightening. Usually, however, love's alluring charms are great enough to overcome such fears.

Loving and being loved can bring new depths of trust and understanding. In turn, we may reveal more of ourselves than we've ever done before. One young woman says, "My partner's love has helped me love myself, and in return to love him more."

But there's a pitfall in all this. When someone's love awakens our own passion and aliveness, it's easy to assume that these qualities depend on him or her. In response, we clutch our partner tightly. The resulting dependency can be so strong that it feels like the end of the world if the one who loved us has a change of heart and walks out of our life. If our self-confidence is low, we can believe there is nothing to sustain our emotional survival. Overdependence on a relationship can lead to an emotional breakdown when it ends. Piecing a broken heart back together is often accomplished tear by tear.

To complicate matters even more, if a person is a love junkie, he or she will sometimes latch on to anyone willing to have sex, no matter how ill-matched the two may seem. In the game of seducing and being seduced, developing independence and inner strength is a central challenge.

At the opposite extreme, some people who have been previously betrayed, rejected, or abandoned, or who have had a dear loved one die, may become paralyzed by the pain of lost love. In fear of feeling that pain again, they avoid risking becoming vulnerable yet another time. Or, if Cupid's arrow has never come and a person feels unlovable, he or she will have a hard time giving or accepting love. Too much focus on the downside of love creates emotional reluctance and a negative outlook. In turn, these negative thoughts may continue to attract a pattern of negative experiences.

But for those who have faith in romance, the words *I love you* imply a willingness to face potential drawbacks and embrace one's own capacity to love.

In this vale of joy and tears, what many of us assume is true love is actually conditional love. Even when it feels all-encompassing, conditional love is centered on mutual sharing with a strong emphasis on "What can I get?" In such love, one insists that the other meets one's conditions. The conditions that are set, consciously or unconsciously, may be about power: "Do as I say and don't challenge me." Or they may be about identity: "Be who I want you to be and don't even think of questioning my wishes." When a person doesn't meet the set conditions, his partner's love moves into the background and another feeling like anger, grief, or jealousy steps in front of it. Then the person might use manipulation, tears, argument, cold hard silence, expensive gifts, violence, or any other means to get the other to do as he desires. His partner's wants and needs take second place to his own. If one person's needs consistently get met more and the other's get met less, the latter's love may fade away.

Typically both partners have their own conditions. If both have equal power, they can compromise and work things out. But if each is stubborn

and insists on having his or her own way, the relationship is apt to be an endless string of power struggles.

Inequalities of power may be embedded in the culture. The male-chauvinist-pig attitude of masculine dominance, stronger in some cultures and weaker in others, defines the man as entitled to make decisions for the woman, the children, or both, regardless of what the other wants. This causes ambivalence and resentment in those who are disempowered. Equality of power nurtures harmony and is an essential part of the most deeply loving relationships.

Another relational pattern involves a mixture of love, jealousy, insecurity, and power. This is called possessive love. One partner's attempts at domination may include trying to control all the other partner's actions, or stopping him or her from growing and changing. This is just one of the many varieties of tainted love.

The more evolved we are, the more closely the love we share with another will match the needs of our partner's inner self. As such relationships endure and mature, we come to accept and even treasure qualities in the other that previously bothered us. Sometimes in love we put up with a lot—but our heart realizes that it's okay.

To grow into mature or conscious love, we have to let go of some of the myths of love. One is that love requires constant closeness. People need time together and time apart. Partners may differ in their desires for closeness, and these needs can change with time. There is also the myth that love must be exclusive. In reality, it's normal to feel different kinds of love toward different people. And the myth that there's just one true love or soul mate for each of us is contradicted by the fact that many people marry happily more than once. Closely related are the myths that people who love each other never disagree, and that true love automatically endures forever. People who love each other can argue and get very mad at each other. People who fall in love sometimes fall out of love. To keep love burning brightly requires that two people work out ways to turn incompatibilities into compatibilities, work together to resolve troubling issues, and share a deep commitment.

Beyond conditional love is conscious love. Conscious love includes making choices that show you are awake, aware, and deliberate with your trust and caring. You offer your best and act in ways that nourish and nurture the other. You let go of your conditions and accept others as they are. Respecting the other's limits and individuality, you listen to his or her needs and try to

meet them as fully as you do your own. The boundaries of your egocentric *me* softens into a wider *we*.

Conscious love means letting go of your preconceived scripts for your relationships. That doesn't mean you have to happily accept everything others do. If they have some ability to change, you can ask them to alter the behavior that troubles you—but sometimes you'll be the one who needs to change for the issue to be resolved. (Viewing another person as “good material” that you can mold into being as you want him or her to be is a prescription for disaster.)

In conscious love, you do more than trust, support, and enjoy each other. You genuinely respect each other, including your differences. Even where you disagree, harmony comes from acceptance of your own and the other's ongoing development. It's a precious gift to be able to look at the world through the lens of your partner's eyes. Such relationships tend not to go stale because the relationship itself evolves and those in it change and grow. Jalalu'ddin Rumi sums this up:

*What then is Love? 'Tis sacrifice  
Of self and self's hard will;  
He that by selfish will is bound  
Can never self fulfill.  
Who loves doth reign, and at his feet  
This and the next world lie.<sup>1</sup>*

Transcendent love is an unconditional love for other people and living beings that flows effortlessly from a well of inner joy. This kind of passion doesn't worry about sexual attraction, compatibilities, dominant roles, or power issues. It is the selfless love about which Jesus spoke when he said, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” People are magnetically attracted to such love. We recognize great souls who radiate it. One such being, Meher Baba, said, “The mind is the treasure-house of learning but the heart is the treasure-house of spiritual wisdom. . . . Divine love will conquer hate and fear.”<sup>2</sup>

But how do we open our hearts to such love? Love for children usually comes easily, and most people adore their pets. But transcendent love for other people doesn't come as easily. What kind of work do we have to do to turn it on, and how can we prepare?

Although there are no easy answers in the unpredictable realm of love, certain forms of mindful meditation can make you more receptive to the

voice of your heart. Mahayogi Pilot Baba declares, “The great saints and philosophers have said, ‘Develop your ability to love.’ So meditation must become a technique to unite the radiant energy of consciousness with the sensitivity and power of your heart.”<sup>3</sup> The practice just below can heighten your ability to perceive what your heart is feeling and help you make conscious choices about it.

## DOORS TO YOUR HEART

The murmurings of your heart can inspire you to explore silent truths and find the right answers for your situation. With patience, you can probably find the willingness to bring more love into your life.

### The Essence

Begin with your starting sequence. Sense your breath, and then close your eyes. Visualize a pair of swinging doors in front of your heart. They can be any size and move into any position, from wide open to tightly closed.

Next, let people in your personal world enter your mind one by one. As each appears, take note of the doors in front of your heart. Are they closed, or open? How far? If there is just a small opening with someone, how do you feel about opening your doors more? Is there anyone with whom you are willing to open them completely? What concrete step or steps can you take that will help in doing that? Is there someone with whom you want to close them a bit more? For you, what makes a person lovable?

Come out of this meditation when you feel that it is complete. What has your inner exploration shown you about your willingness to love?

### Variations in Technique

As you go through a day, with each person you meet, friend or stranger, check out how open or closed the doors to your heart seem to be. Be especially attentive to when you feel willing to open them a little more and when you don't.

Let your heart and mind have a dialog to discover what makes the doors close or open. What qualities make you want to open your heart and how easily can you do so? How do you stop yourself from opening those doors? You don't have to have the answers to all these questions. Adopt the attitude of a student who is learning about love from within. Amma makes this sound easy when she says, “Love is not complex—it is simple and spontane-

ous. Indeed, love is our essential nature. . . . To love means to see and feel life in everything.”<sup>4</sup>

### Points in the Process

If you seldom feel open-hearted, you can catch the feeling of it by being near someone who radiates love. Meher Baba has said, “Love is essentially self-communicative; those who do not have it catch it from those who have it. . . . It goes on gathering power and spreading itself until eventually it transforms everyone it touches.”<sup>5</sup> You may also open your heart by honoring the positive aspects of the love you find within yourself.