

On Love



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The purpose of life is to love with good boundaries as many people as we can. Throughout this essay my reference to loving “people” includes loving other activities or interests as well. This includes the types of work we do, pets, art forms and other interests.

Love is the most powerful force in the world. This love is cooperative love, not romantic or sexual love which are lustful rather than loving. Sex is the second most powerful force in the world and money is the third most powerful force in the world. Power is the ability to make things happen. We are able to do things out of love for family members, our community, friends, work or our spiritual beliefs we would be totally unable to do if we were not motivated by love. How and what we love becomes a very crucial issue in each of our lives.

The primary difficulty of loving is maintaining boundaries between all our loves and ourselves. Sometimes we merge with what we love completely losing our personal boundaries with what we love. The one thing we love, whether it is a person or an activity, consumes our whole life. We lose our personal identity and become totally defined by the one thing we love. This ultimately results in tragedy. Loving only one thing consumes us and is very unstable. Invariably there are fluctuations in the degree of attachment or connection to or from what is loved. Having other loves sustains us during these periods.

To have several loves we must have emotional and relationship boundaries in order to love safely and fully. The first boundary is between what we love and ourselves. Some of us attempt to feel lovable ourselves by succeeding at a challenge such as making money, achieving professional status or having others admire us. This always eventually fails. We must first love ourselves (see On Loving Ourselves). If we are unable to do this we need help from someone else to learn how to love ourselves independently from activities or other external relationships. If we are unable to love ourselves we are

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incapable of truly loving anyone or anything else. The first boundary in all relationships is to love ourselves in the activity or relationship as much as we love the activity or relationship. If we believe we love the other activity more than we love ourselves we are wrong and actually love neither.

The second boundary for loving is the boundary between the things we love. This requires commitment and thoughtfulness. If we wish to love our spouse, our children, our greater family, our friends, our work and our other activities we need to devote attention to each unhindered by our other loves. If we work so much we never have time to be with our spouse, children, friends or family then the love for the people in our life will wither and die. Love is alive. It requires active and thoughtful nurturing. Many people have difficulty managing the boundaries between their loves. People violate marital boundaries by having sexual relationships outside the marriage believing it will not injure either their relationship with their spouse or their lover if we can keep it secret! That is not possible.

Since the first boundary of love involves the boundary between what we love and ourselves, any dishonesty results in deceiving *ourselves* as well as misleading others. Once we begin to deceive ourselves we no longer are able to trust our judgment about anything. Some people believe they may lie to others and always tell themselves the truth. That itself is a lie and always ultimately will fail. To be honest with ourselves we must always also be honest with others. This does not mean to be concrete and candid in all our relationships but it does mean always to the best of our abilities to communicate to others what we truly feel or believe about them in as lovingly a manner as we can. However Thumper's Rule still applies: "If you don't have anything nice to say don't say anything at all." If we are patient we will find ways to communicate difficult thoughts and feelings to those we love in carrying ways. Anger, precipitated by fear, always makes us say silly and stupid things.

Love and lust are different. They are frequently confused. Lust is pursuing anything that provides instant gratification. This gratification is usually biologically based and related to the release of some chemical in our body that produces an immediate good feeling. Love is developing an intimate understanding of our relationship to another person, or activity or area of interest we may have. Love abides. Love lasts forever. Love fulfills us. Lust last a few moments leaving us inappropriately hungry for more.

Many lustful activities release endorphins in our brains and make us feel instantly good whether the activity is truly good for us or not. Sexual gratification, eating, exercising intensely, intense emotions and pain are examples of lustful activities. All activities that may be done lustfully may also be done lovingly when we are genuinely engaged with the activity overall. Sexual gratification in the context of commitment and open emotional communication is loving as well as lustful. A gourmet meal enjoyed with close friends is loving as well as lustful. Playing a sport you study, share with others,

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watch as a spectator and promote to others is loving as well as lustful. Engaging in dangerous or painful activities we are expert in may be loving as well as potentially lustful.

Returning to the second boundary of love – between the objects of our love – there are several clear principles we must follow. The first principle is always to talk about anyone who is absent as though they are present in the room. Unhealthy people often attempt to split the love between someone they love and others by secretly or indirectly telling the person they wish to fully possess bad things about persons who are absent. For example, Sally may tell John bad things about Jim when Jim is not present to try to rupture John's attachment to Jim and there by get John all to herself – or so Sally believes. A wise person realizes when anyone says anything bad or unkind about an absent person they – the wise person – is next in line to have bad things said about them if they trust and openly reveal themselves to the person who is being critical of the absent person. Wise people do not necessarily overtly object to Sally's manipulations. Rather they quietly and discretely withdraw from Sally's world. Thus Sally's world becomes filled with dishonest and deceitful people. This then confirms Sally's belief “everyone is out for himself or herself” and “only the strong survive.” Sally's world becomes a reflection of her belief and behavior. Sally's belief she can consciously or unconsciously manipulate John is thus untrue. Healthy people will avoid her and her world will become filled with unhealthy and unloving people who share the practice of judging those whom they have never met based upon a third person's biased and destructively motivated comments.

Another principal about love is we are generally unable to love ourselves directly. We love ourselves best through the others we love. By expressing loving attitudes and behaviors towards others we become able to experience love ourselves. This is the only way we are able to fully experience love. While feeling, thinking and behaving in a deeply loving way towards all those around us we also begin to experience love both in our relationship to ourselves as well as with others. A few years ago several of my children told me, “Dad, you are too nice to people. You are too willing to accept what they are saying. You should be more skeptical and pessimistic about what other people are trying to do to you.” My response was, “Who do I spend all of my time with?” which they did not answer. I said, “I spend all of my time with myself and I am kind to myself and believing of myself too. I learn who the safe people and unsafe people are in time. However I spend all of my time with myself and I am always safe with me!”

In life there truly is no other. Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, “Remove the log from your own eye before you remove the speck from your brothers.” This is a statement of genius and quite profound. It not only means we have flaws within ourselves needing to be corrected before we start correcting others but it also states quite clearly whatever flaw we perceive in others is also in ourselves in an amplified way already! Although this idea is intuitively incorrect it is psychological absolutely correct. Our judgments of others reflect areas within ourselves even more greatly in need of attention. Not only are

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we suffering from it, but because it is a “log in our eye,” we are likely also blind to it. Never be surprised when you learn the fundamentalist preacher who decries sex is discovered to be having sex forcefully with his secretary or the radio celebrity who says we should put all the drug abusers in jail is already – or soon to become – a drug abuser himself – deserving treatment rather than jail! The curses we place on others we also place upon ourselves. There is no other. At some level it is all “us”. For each of us the world is what we perceive it to be. What we perceive is what we believe to be true which is often significantly different from what is actually true. Indeed the speck we see in the other’s eye may only be a reflection of the log in ours.

Love is an intimate, persistent, reliable attachment to someone or something that is perceived as outside of ourselves. In the process of loving and caring for and nurturing another object we are also at the same time loving and nurturing ourselves. In some way these love objects exist also within us as a part of ourselves. The belief we can “sacrifice ourselves for others” is a perversion of any religious belief. When we are absolutely centered in the Love within ourselves Love is all we experience even as we die. When a parent rescues his or her child from death inadvertently losing her or his own life no parent would return to say he or she sacrificed themselves. Rather the parent would say they died protecting what they loved and life has no greater gift than to have the privilege to spend it in the fulfillment of what we love. True sacrifice and tragedy is when people die loveless. When people no longer have anything they love in life they do die. Old men have a very high rate of death following the death of their spouses because frequently old men have few other love attachments. This is not the case for old women who frequently have multiple love attachments sustaining them well beyond the death of their husbands.

Loving people follow the guide of First Corinthians 13. They are gentle and thoughtful. They always speak kindly of others or do not speak until they are able to understand another in a loving way. They do not seek praise from others or boast about themselves or others but see all of us as equals who are following unique paths through life. I have had the privilege to know some angels in my life. One of them was a middle-aged woman who worked as a licensed practical nurse at a state mental hospital I worked at for a number of years. When she was present on the unit I worked on, the unit was usually calm. No matter what happened on the unit or what problems she was presented with she was always genuinely cheerful and more importantly she saw to the middle, into the souls of all those around her with no distinction for whether it was a patient, who truly need the protection of a hospital, or a staff person, who felt exasperated about ridiculous governmental decrees making the paperwork and appearances become more important than what actually happened to people. She sent healing and caring feelings into those around her. Everyone liked her but she was highly unlikely to ever be elected into a leadership roll. She enthusiastically dedicated herself to activities benefitting patients and quietly endured administrative mandates she did not understand; seemed pointless but assumed someone had a good reason for.

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Unfortunately English has only one word for love. The Greeks had at least three: eros, philia and agape. Eros is sexual love based in romance; philia is also called brotherly love and is love for others based on family or group association. Agape is unconditional universal love for all persons and things based on the understanding we are all one; we are inseparable from the universe and we are inseparable from each other. Agape is the awareness of the rhythm and flow of existence. Agape is feeling and being where we are right now, immediately, without fear of what happened before or what will happen next. The universe has a miraculous order to it. Worrying about what has been or what will be will not motivate changes and produce works making the future livable or the past less painful. Living now from the love in our hearts will cause our behavior to bear healthy fruit nourishing the future and enlightening our understanding of the past so that we all may experience love now if only we accept love's point of view.

Fear is the opposite of love. When we fear we are not trusting love. Evil is fear made manifest and is only real if we believe it to be. The life and love force of the universe has been in perfect balance for the billions of years it took to create you. We did not arise out of chaos growing greater but rather from the miraculous victory of order over chaos. The life force in each of us has been in motion since the beginning of life on earth. The elements in our bodies were formed in stars. We are truly made from stardust. We can accomplish any loving goal we commit ourselves to.

If you are needing to feel more love in your life, find someone, anyone – the fast food clerk, your child, your parent, your neighbor, the person in the car next to you, to express kindness, acceptance and joy to and you will be guaranteed to receive it back greater than you can imagine. Love is the most powerful force in the world. It only needs you to set it free.

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