

STAGE RE-BUILDING TEN

LOVE

Many people need to relearn how to love in order to love more maturely. Your capacity to love others is based on your capacity to love yourself as I explore in The Power of Caring series. Learning to love yourself is not selfish and conceited in fact it is the most mentally healthy thing you can do. There are a number of specific steps you can take to increase your self love and connection with your true self.

Love is like sitting with my back to the fireplace I can feel the warmth without every seeing the fire.

Love is the greatest gift you can receive but you have to give it to yourself. Peter

Over the past thirty years I have asked thousands of people to do this exercise in the adjustment seminars and it normally proves a very difficult assignment for most people to do. A typical separated person says *'I thought I knew what love is but I guess I don't'* In fact many people feel inadequate about their definition of love. Love is like a diamond and you can view it from many different directions and there is no right or wrong way of defining it. There is only the way you feel about love.

In our society many people have stereotyped love to be something you do for somebody or to somebody. Very few people realise that love is something that should be centred within you and that the basis of loving others it he love you have for yourself.



To begin this section let me present a somewhat cynical definition upon which many relationships are based 'Love is the warm feeling that you get toward somebody who meets your neurotic needs.' This is a definition of neediness rather than love. Because we are not whole and complete people but have emotional deficiencies we try to fill those emotional deficits by 'loving' another person. What we lack in ourselves we hope to find in the other person in other words many of us are half people trying to love someone in order to become whole. My experience working with people has given me the following idea about love coming from a whole person who is more mature in their life.

Perhaps you have heard the expression 'warm and fuzzy with a fish hook in them'. A warm fuzzy is a nice gesture that you give someone such as saying I love you. Unfortunately many of us are still struggling to fulfill ourselves. So if a life is empty then when a person says 'I love you' it probably means *'Please, please love me.'* The other person finds the warm fuzzy statement attractive so swallows it, and is hooked. Saying 'I love you' from an empty heart of emotional connections tends to be manipulative, while love from a heart of connections and embracing who we are as a unique individual allows others to be themselves and to be free to share in our lives.

A common problem in society is that falling in love is the most acceptable reason for entering a committed relationship however falling in love may have more to do with loneliness than with warmth towards another person. Falling in love to overcome loneliness is not actually love. It is rather a feeling of warmth which comes from breaking down the barriers that have kept us from being intimate with other people.

Sometimes one does not love the other person, but loves instead the idealised image of that person. When the difference is realised, one becomes disillusioned, falls out of love, and the relationship is dissolved. If a couple can grow past the stage of loving their idealised image of each other, there is the possibility that they will be able to love in a more mature manner. For some, this growth will occur in the relationship and their love for each other will mature. For others, maturity comes only after the dissolution of an immature relationship.

I have seen many people loving with an immature love: Love equals doing something to somebody or for somebody; Love equals taking care of someone; Love equals 'never having to say you're sorry'; Love equals always being strong; Love equals being nice. Shirley had believed that love equals being nice and she was trying to improve an unhealthy relationship. Ken asked her in the seminar why it was not working for her to be nice. Shirley replied, 'I guess I just wasn't nice enough.!'.

Many (most?) of us, while growing up, have not received enough unconditional love - love that was given by parents or others just because we were, not because we earned it by being 'good'. We adopt immature forms of love toward others because we have not been loved unconditionally. Nevertheless we can come to realise that mature love equals loving yourself for being what you are, and likewise loving another person for who he or she is. When we can feel such "unconditional no-matter-how-you-act-love" we have learned what I call mature love. Mature love allows you fully to be yourself with the person you love.

In my experience it difficult for many people to give up the immature forms of love because that is the way they have always received their strokes, attention, and good feelings. Yet eventually

they recognise that they had to keep striving harder in order to earn the love they were seeking. It is like settling for second best taking whatever strokes we can rather than going all the way to get really good strokes by learning to love ourselves.

Building on my experience I have found that many people write that love is caring and giving and making the other person happy and that very few people include in their definition of love a mature idea of self-love. If the centre of your love is in your partner and the relationship dissolves the centre is suddenly removed and this makes ending of your relationship even more painful. What might it be like if you have become a whole person and learned to love yourself? If the ending of your relationship does happen then there would still be pain and trauma but it would not be so devastating for you and you would still be a whole person.

The ending of a relationship is very traumatic for those who have not centred their love within themselves and learned to love themselves. Many end up feeling unlovable or that they are incapable of loving another person. So naturally many try to prove to themselves that they are lovable and search for another relationship immediately. In the section of sexuality we explore how some become sexually promiscuous in developing all kinds of relationships with anyone who comes along. Clearly they have confused sex and love, feeling that if they go out and find sex and with it will come the love they have been missing and needing for so long.

The old Beatles line, 'All the lonely people - where do they all come from?' expresses for me the vital needs so many people have who have never learned to love and be loved. In our modern society it has become increasingly easy to love other people and not allow

oneself to be loved so here, by wanting to love another person you may really be hiding your own need to be loved.

We can see how the need to be unconditionally loved is not met in our lives for when we are a child love appears unconditional by the basics of food clothing, shelter, care and physical affection so the child has no question that this love is infinite and omnipotent. Then what happens with age, maturity and awareness? We become aware that another can stop loving another for any reason or that the love may be ended by death so for adults it is emotionally difficult to accept unconditional love. What I am putting forward is to approach such an apparent problem by learning to love yourself unconditionally with a simple acceptance of yourself for what you are: a unique individual with no one else in the world like you.

Naturally it is difficult to love yourself if you haven't been loved as a child and this is where a spiritual relationships become important because if you can develop faith in a Supreme Being who gives unconditional love which has been difficult for you to accept within yourself then you experience value of being loved for who we are and not for what we do for someone else. Here we experience unconditional love and once we have such a connection then we can extend the same unconditional love for others.

Back to science for a short while to define consciously so we can build a bridge to our emotional self. Psychologists place a great deal of emphasis on personalities. One way of looking at such psychological diagnosis is that they are all trying to define different ways that people are compensating for a lack of love and if we could peel back these diagnoses down to the heart and core we would find that the basic problem is that people have not learned to love and be loved.

In my series 'The Power of Caring' which I created in 1989 I continually return to this simple and yet for many elusive connection where I am emphasizing unconditional love so strongly because it is such a vital quality for human growth. To know that I am valuable enough just because I am me and to be loved regardless of how I act. However in my work I continually find that the belief that love is doing something to or for somebody and so rather than love being centred within us it is clearly always centred within someone else. This naturally leaves us feeling how our energy is constantly being drained from us rather than experiencing such energy expanding and filling our day to day lives.

Take a break and then return and take a look at some of the common ways of exchanging and thereby exploring different forms of love.

Friendship LOVE is not as loaded with emotion and feeling for as the relationships starts with liking each other, and then this liking just grows into something more which might be called love. It is cooler, lacking in the passion of romantic love. Sex is not as important to the friendship lover, often developing long after the relationship has begun. This is one of the most stable styles of loving and it is not unusual for people who develop this style of loving to remain good friends even if the relationship ends because their love was based upon mutual respect and friendship rather than strong emotional feelings.

Game Playing Love regards the relationship as a game with certain rules to follow and game players are not as interested in intimacy as romantic lovers in fact they may have several simultaneous relationships in order to avoid closeness and

intimacy. Such lovers tend to make up their own special rules and their relationships will follow whatever rules are most convenient.

For example there is the needy style of loving that tends to be full of possessiveness and dependency. This style of loving is very emotional and such intensity makes the relationship unstable. The people involved tend to have difficulty maintaining the relationship because they feel intense emotions such as jealousy, possessiveness which naturally results insecurity. Some look for another relationship within a short time in order to be happy based on an immature style of dependent and possessive love.

The Practical Lover takes a realistic look at their partner and decides, on a rational and intellectual basis, if this love is appropriate. This sort of partner will make sure that there is a similarity in spiritual or religious; political; financial views on handling money as well as family life. Naturally they will include exploring any failings in their partner's family, socioeconomic statues, characteristics in the way that they look as well for some genetic makeup. The practical lover will choose to someone with whom it 'makes good sense' to love.

The Altruistic Lovers may be somewhat 'other person' centred in being very willing to meet the needs of the other person. When this is carried to the extreme the altruistic lover may become the martyr based on meeting other people's needs by giving all of their energy, money and time to the other person.

Then there is the **Authentic Altruistic Lover** who is someone with a full heart and enough inner strength to be able to love another person in a very unselfish manner and it interesting

to note from my experience and the experiences of my colleagues how such a person has a powerful spiritual belief.

Each person is obviously a mixture of these styles and there is no one style that fits us all at all times. Understanding your own mixture of styles is very important when you enter a committed relationship or partnership with another person. One couple with whom I was doing marriage counselling had a great deal of difficulty because he was a friendship lover and she a romantic lover.

She felt that his cool love was not love at all and he felt that her romantic love was unstable. His style of loving was to take care of her, provide for her needs and stay with her in the relationship as proof of his love for her. When she asked him to say 'I love you' and to express other romantic thoughts and feeling so that she felt loved he could not answer. They had difficulty in communicating and understanding each other's viewpoints because their basic beliefs about what love was and was not were incompatible.

At this point and as a guide how about the question 'How do we learn to love ourselves?' and as we have seen the answer is not always easy so here are some specific exercises that will help with learning to love yourself. However before beginning think of a time in your life when you started to make changes which may be been when you first had difficulties in your relationship or when the two of you first separated or, for that matter, when you decided to work with me in rebuilding.

Make a list of changes that you have made, the personal growth that you have experienced since that time and the things you have learned about yourself, others and of course life. Consider the feeling of confidence you have gained from learning these things

and getting more in control of your own life. That confidence is what provides you with good, positive feelings and then length of your list may come as a pleasant surprise.

I am indebted to Virginia Satir who devised a method of helping people learn to gain more self-love which I would like to introduce you to. She asked people to make a list of five adjectives that could describe them. After you have made this list of five adjectives go through a put a plus or a minus sign after each word to indicate whether you think this a positive or negative adjective. After you have done this, look at the minus adjectives and see if you can find anything positive about that particular word in terms of a quality or aspect of your personality.

A woman in one of the seminars listed the adjective 'bitchy'. When questioned about it she said how her husband constantly referred to her in this way. As she began to talk about it to the group she realised what he called bitchiness she called assertiveness in the sense a positive way to stick up for herself. So once she now understood that difference of labels she was able to accept that as a part of herself and now feel good about it.

After all that is what self is: learning to accept ourselves for what and who we are. As Carl Rogers stated, when we learn to accept ourselves for who and what we are, then that often gives us permission to grow, change, and become something different. Where we can embrace the next unfolding stages of our life. However for as long as you don't accept a part of who you are you will naturally have trouble changing that part. We all need to discover that 'it's okay not to be okay' in certain areas of our life. We have all had traumatic experiences that have left us wounded and times when we did not feel loved. But those experiences are a part of our life and living such a life. We are not perfect because

we are human beings and when we learn to accept some of the non-okay things about us then we are in balance where such balance allows us to be authentic.

How does one learn to love another person? What causes the feelings of love for another person to begin? Perhaps it was a kind and thoughtful deed they did; maybe by doing something that met your needs, or they made you feel good about yourself. So, if you were to set aside a period of time tomorrow to do something that really felt good and made you feel okay about yourself then that could be a way of learning to love yourself more fully and completely. After all, it would be you that was capable of doing something kind and loveable for you.

In my work and in my own life the most important method of learning to love yourself has been to give permission to love yourself and if you can decide that it is okay, and not selfish or self-centred to love yourself maybe you can allow yourself to move into a place where you have feelings of self-love?

As we finish and prepare of our next one to one discussion the growth that you have achieved is something that no one has done for you and so no one can take it away from you. Your life is in your control, through a real heartfelt knowledge about yourself and others. To that extent you are not at the mercy of other people anymore. Let the good feelings of your development at this stage in your life become heartfelt. Let yourself just feel love for yourself for a while because it is not just okay to feel love for yourself, no it is more than okay, it is the way life is meant to be.

CHECKLIST for our next one to one session.

1. I feel I am lovable
2. I am not afraid of being loved
3. I am not afraid of loving another
4. I have an understanding of what I believe love is
5. I am living a lifestyle that is in balance with my definition of love
6. I feel comfortable with meeting my own needs rather than feeling and labeling myself as selfish
7. I am able to accept love from others
8. I am able to express love to others in a way that makes them feel loved
9. I am able to love myself
10. I have experienced a great deal of personal growth since my crisis began
11. I am trying to develop my immature, needy, dependent parts of love into a more mature style of loving