

CHAPTER 1

Love—The Greatest Value

All people without exception have the desire to love and be loved. Love occupies the mind of so many on a daily basis. It is perhaps the most written about topic of most poems and songs. The majority of songs are written about love, in no matter what country you find yourself in. However, not all of them speak about the joy of love. There are also many songs about love that was lost, unfaithful love, the search for love, falling in and out of love.

Why do people read novels, watch movies and sing songs about love? Because love touches a chord that vibrates within every person's body and soul. We want love that fills us up completely and flows through every vein in our body, which will last forever. No one longs to find someone who will love them only temporarily, for a few months or a few years. That could hardly be called love. No one dreams of a love that will be only partially satisfying. We all seek love that fills us completely, that totally intoxicates us. And we want to remain in love for the rest of our lives. Is there anyone who does not seek that kind of love?

At the same time why is love so unpredictable, so mysterious, so intangible? Why can we say that in the end we do not really know what love is? Why does love so often carry

such a false veneer? Why are so many people confused by love? Love, like water, seems to be so light and fragile, yet its power to cause harm is tremendous. It is so insubstantial that it has no solid boundaries, yet a person can drown in it and die. Love can cut and be as brittle as ice, and it also can disappear like a cloud. Yet, like water, love is that which sustains all life.

Therefore, it is definitely a worthy pursuit to find out what love is despite the elusiveness of it. Is it something you can deliberately go out and get, or do you wait for it to come to you? Are some people destined to find love and others not? How can you be sure you found it? Is it really worth the trouble to find?

What is love?

Can love be defined? What are the elements and characteristics of love?

In order for love to exist there has to be a circuit between two people. When one person gives love to another, and the desire to return love arises within the other person, a circuit is created which often becomes a treasured bond that neither want to break. Eventually the bond created between the two may become so strong, that they never want to separate. No force in the universe could break that bond. In this case the two partners become as one being. They can't imagine anything else but to perpetuate their love.

Why and how can this kind of love be created? Could some kind of give and take between two people appear like love when it is not in reality? Why does a circuit of love, once started, sometimes die? How can a relationship of love be revived? Is this actually possible?

There are a lot of things that are not love, however much they may look like the real thing. Perhaps this is the reason why there are so many broken hearts and dreams in our world. C. S. Lewis said that "to love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken." Let us examine some of the features of authentic love.

Complementarity

In the natural world most things exist in pairs. Everything exists due to the give-and-take action between two complementary entities. All things living and nonliving exist in this kind of relationship. An electron whirls around a proton. Planets orbit around the sun. Lineage is passed on through the partnership of men and women. By the same token, one pole cannot exist without the other. Similarly, there are only two genders, not three, not four. Not only are there only two genders, but they are also perfectly complementary, physically as well in many social and emotional aspects. It is fascinating that the ratio of baby boys and girls born annually is almost always 50-50. They are indeed meant for each other!

Much about masculinity and femininity can be learned from nature. It is not something that we discover just by having sexual relationships. We are attracted to the opposite sex because we are intrinsically meant to find fulfillment with our complementary other.

Constancy

Another quality that reflects the nature of love is constancy. A mother gives her child love without ever thinking about the costs that are involved or the sacrifices that she might have to make. A loving mother gives every ounce of her strength to give birth to her child, bears any kind of pain, nourishes her baby with her milk, spends many nights awake in order to comfort her baby, worries about her baby's health every day and sacrifices anything to assure the health and well being of her child. After so many sleepless nights and years of sacrifice, when her child is grown, will that mother bill her child for all the expense and sacrifice? No. Because no amount of money can repay the love that a mother invested in her child. The only currency she can accept in return is also love. That child, in turn, when raising his or her own children cannot help but give all the love he or she received to his or her own children.

Loving someone does not mean to withhold love depending on the good or bad deeds done by the other person. The old adage "love is blind" could mean that a person may be blinded into thinking something is love when it is not, but it originally meant love is non-judgmental. It is love that says, "I love you just because you



are you.” Would a mother testify against her beloved son in a court of law? Even if she knew he had done something wrong and accepted his term of sentence, she would defend her child’s goodness in her heart to the end, always looking at him with loving eyes. A person who loves in this way loves the other person through thick and thin. A wife will keep loving her husband even if he is going through very hard times and feels discouraged and hopeless about his job, or finances, or even his worth. A husband will love his wife even when she loses her youth and begins to turn gray. True love is love that says, “You are more precious to me than my own life, for loving you is my whole reason for being.”

Eternity

Every generation lives for the sake of the next generation. Love seeks to perpetuate itself. Love gives life meaning. This is why many people feel that love is more precious than life itself. Life is created through love. Before you were born, your father and mother were drawn together because of love, and in a moment of mutual surrender to love, you were conceived. Therefore, love precedes life. Because of this the birth of a human being is considered more precious than any material thing in this world.

Did you ever stop for a moment to realize that practically every one of the billions of individuals in this world came into existence because of the love between a man and a woman? Because an entire lineage is created through love, it can be perpetuated from generation to generation without decreasing in value.

Power of love

Pitirim Sorokin, a Russian émigré who founded the School of Altruistic Love at Harvard University, was convinced that people should know about the ways and power of love. Sorokin spoke of five aspects or dimensions that characterize one’s ability to love.

He called the first dimension *intensity*. When we see someone who preaches about love, but does not practice it, then we know that the intensity of their love is just about zero. An example of low intensity of love is when someone gives a few coins to a beggar on the street, when he may have hundreds of dollars in his pocket. The highest intensity on the other hand means the willingness to give up something precious and meaningful for the sake of love. The ultimate example of high intensity love is being willing to die for the sake of another. As Jesus said: “Greater love has no man than this, than he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

There are known many examples when a soldier on the battlefield rushes out into enemy fire to rescue a fallen comrade. However, that same soldier may a few hours later be once again a perfectly ordinary person. He may not even be especially friendly to the man he rescued. His love was of only a short *duration*, which is the second of Sorokin’s dimensions. Most people do not want to experience love that is

temporary and only lasts a day, or a year, but forever. Couples who marry seek for a love that will last forever, in sickness and in health, through both good and bad times. This is because true love is eternal.

Another dimension of love is *extension* or scope. There are people who love only themselves or their families. How broad is *your* love? Can your love cross the boundaries of race, nationality and religion? Would you be even willing to marry a person of a different race, nationality or religion?

The fourth dimension is *purity*. Pure love is loving another for what he or she is, not for what the other possesses or with the expectation to get something in return. No one wants to be treated as a means to an end. One will quickly feel used and taken advantaged of when loved with an ulterior motive.

The fifth dimension is *adequacy*, the connection between the purpose of love and the actual results. While I may genuinely love someone very much, the results of my love might still be harmful. We are all familiar with the pampered child who has been spoiled by love without discipline. Sometimes love has to be tough to be kind. Inadequate love is unwise, ignorant and blind, and exhibits a wrong choice of priorities and inappropriate behavior. True love always finds the appropriate behavior for any situation.

Conditional love

Of all the various forms of love, the highest and most mature is the love that gives without expecting anything in return. It is selfless and unchanging. Of course, everyone desires to be at the receiving end of love, but a mature person continues to love even when he is not loved in return. This love is *unconditional*. Although unconditional love might seem somewhat farfetched, it can be commonly observed as parental love. Unconditional love does not calculate how much has been given and decides that it is enough. Unconditional love knows no limits.

Human beings long for such unconditional love. However, *conditional* love is also necessary in order for growth to occur. Conditional love, guided by principles and expectations, challenges a person to grow and become a better version of themselves because it forces one to think of the needs of another rather than of oneself. Parents are often proud of their children's accomplishment and sometimes they are disappointed by their behavior. In that sense, parental love is earned. It encourages the child to become independent, self-disciplined and responsible for what he does. Knowing that one has been able to make someone else happy is one of the greatest joys of life. It strengthens our self-esteem and makes us feel that we can contribute something of unique value to others. We feel that we can make a difference. Of course, parental love should be patient, tolerant and unconditional, but conditional love is also very important for our growth.

On the other hand conditional love can be misused. "Deserved" love can easily leave a bitter feeling behind that one is not loved for oneself, but only because one pleases the other person. When love is immature and self-centered, it controls and



manipulates. This type of conditional love prevents us from being our true selves. We have to meet other peoples' conditions to receive their love:

"I will love you *if* you make enough money"

"I will be your friend *if* you do what I want to do"

"I'll love you *if* you have sex with me"

We often find ourselves setting conditions for people to be worthy of our love. To love and to be loved means to be able to trust someone and be vulnerable. This is difficult for many, since most of us struggle with many fears that inhibit our ability to love deeply. We often wonder with much apprehension if we can allow ourselves to be open and vulnerable. Most of us are afraid to be hurt, to have our hearts broken and to feel pain. What makes a particular person worthy of my trust and love? Will he be compatible with me and be able to meet my needs? Will I be able to live with those irritating and annoying habits of his? Such concerns lead us to place conditions on our openness. Thus, it is not easy to keep a loving heart.

Unconditional love

Receiving love unconditionally gives us a deep sense of peace, security, contentment and well-being. Unconditional love means that we are loved for whom we are, not for how much we give back. It need not be deserved or acquired and cannot be controlled. We are loved not because we meet certain conditions, but because of our uniqueness. This does not mean that we should rest content with the way we are. Although unconditional love gives us a sense of well-being, it can also inspire us to be a better person and to constantly improve ourselves. In an atmosphere of unconditional love, we feel free to let our full, unique potential blossom without fear of losing the love that means so much to us. Unconditional love makes it possible for us to believe in ourselves, to feel we are valuable and good. It strengthens our self-esteem.

How do you know whether you have found genuine love? You know that you are loved unconditionally when there is nothing you could do that would ever separate you from the love another person has for you. As the 43rd president of the United States, George W. Bush, once said to his twin daughters "You can't make me stop loving you, so quit trying so hard." Once the heart has opened and we have been deeply touched by another person, we are affected by that person for the rest of our lives, no matter what form the relationship may take.

When we love unconditionally, we will gain the ability to love the whole world step by step. Each person becomes our brother and sister. This is the essence of Christianity— love all people as brothers and sisters.

False love

But is this reality? We may be able to envision what true love is, but for most people the reality is far, far different. Almost everyone longs for this ideal of love, has tried to love, but has been hurt, betrayed, and disillusioned. Each year more people decide to break a marriage than to begin one. Why is there such a high rate of divorce? People marry or engage in sexual relations because they think they are in love, but if love were truly present, could it simply disappear? There is a big difference between genuine love and what often passes for love in our world.

We can easily be taken in by what we may call false love. True love and false love sometimes have the same starting point. They may even look alike for awhile, but the different directions of these loves ultimately brings dramatically different results. True genuine love is unconditional, selfless, and unchanging. It does not come with a price tag attached. It produces true joy and happiness. False love is a love that revolves around oneself and seeks to fulfill one's own immediate needs and desires. This kind of love is conditional and changeable.

When love is not genuine it does not last and cannot bring happiness in the long run because it is centered on the person's own needs. When two people are in a relationship, each expecting their needs to be fulfilled by the other, rather than thinking what they can give to each other, the relationship eventually will shake and fall apart. This principle is difficult to see, especially in the beginning of a romance, when everything just seems so perfect. At such times one's ability to see things as they really are is greatly impaired. But, because the motivation for the relationship is self-centered, true fulfillment and satisfaction never comes. Although no one wants such love, we often find ourselves caught in it and hurt by it.

Reviving the family ideal

The wounds and scars that shallow, selfish love leaves behind should teach us to seek a less self-destructive kind of love. However, the habits that are still being passed down from generation to generation die hard and it is difficult to heal the damage it has created. Many people today feel we have to go back and investigate the ideal of the family as the school of love.

Most of us spend the first two decades of our lives with our parents who love and raise us, and educate us about the world. Thus, it is within the family that we have our most profound and influential experiences. We learn how to make relationships, how to love, how to behave, what's good and bad. We often unconsciously model our parents attitudes and behaviors that we have observed from an early age. Whether we are loved and how we are loved influences greatly our sense of self-worth. The

tiniest infant can sense whether it is loved or not. A loving and supportive atmosphere helps to mold a human being of great and noble value.

So, this is the question that every person entering adult life faces: How can I find and experience the greatest love: the kind of love that everyone dreams and fantasizes about, the kind of love that poets write about, singers sing about, writers write novels about, the kind of love that is portrayed in movies? How can I have that kind of love: the kind that will last forever?



How can I experience unconditional love?

- ✘ Choose to be around people who love and care about you without conditions and unrealistic expectations. People who have a strong and secure sense of themselves will let you be you and accept you for who you are. Be around people who encourage you to be the best you can be, who believe in you. Surround yourself with those who make you want to be the best that you can be. And then be that kind of a person for others.
- ✘ The world is full of judges. Cultivate relationships with people who do not criticize and judge you. Your anxiety level will drop dramatically because you do not feel like you are on trial. Neither should you judge others. We are here to love and learn from each other.



- ✘ Does it mean that a person who unconditionally loves you is always nice to you and has no expectations of you? Being simply “nice” and being unconditional are two different things in this context. Being simply “nice” means that a person sometimes will approve of self-centered behavior, because they don’t want to risk upsetting the person or jeopardizing the relationship. However, unconditional and genuine love will not accept self-centered behavior because its concern runs deeper than just wanting to get along all the time. Rather it keeps the other person’s best interest in mind. Because this love deeply cares about the other, it encourages him to become a better person. This is a true expression of love. However, even if the person fails to change, he will still be loved and will be expected to do the same for others.
- ✘ Become your own best friend. Don’t be too hard on yourself. Stop criticizing yourself constantly for every little fault. Recognize your strengths and good qualities. Give your best at all times and appreciate even small steps of improvement. The better you feel about yourself, the greater your self-confidence and it will help you to improve your attitude towards others.

Individual Exercise



Find different examples of love: in literature, in the life surrounding you or in your own experiences. In which of these cases was love conditional? Formulate those conditions, using the following examples as a guide:

I’ll love you as long as...

you look attractive

I’ll love you if...

you don’t embarrass me

I will be your friend if...

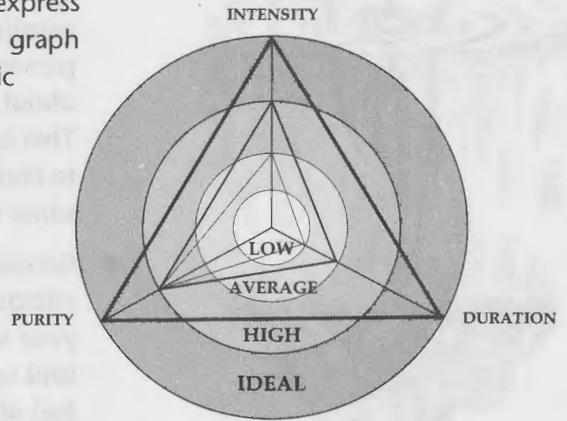
you stop being the friend of...

For Your Journal



The purpose of the following assignment is to evaluate the love between you and a person who is dear to you. In order to do that you can use three of the five dimensions of love we discussed earlier—intensity, duration and purity. Each one of these dimensions can be evaluated as “ideal”, “high”, “average”, and “low”. Evaluate your love towards that person and vice versa.

It would be useful to express the results of your work in graph form. Draw four concentric circles. Each one of them should correspond to one of the levels of your evaluation. Also draw three lines corresponding the three dimensions that are being evaluated. Connect them with lines (this can be done using different colors). Compare the resulting triangles with each other as well as with the triangle corresponding to the expression of true love.



If we are honest, we will learn a lot about love through this exercise, which can help us to move towards becoming a more kind and loving person.

See the Appendix for the psychological test pertaining to this lesson.

The Velveteen Rabbit

by Margery Williams Bianco

This favorite children's tale contains a great deal of wisdom about the nature of true love as that which goes far beyond external appearances to reach into the heart of a person. As the story says, it is not something that happens all at once but grows almost imperceptibly over a long period of time. When love is real, it can never be lost.

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came in to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become REAL."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time... Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose *you* are Real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him.

One night the Boy's Nana gave him the Rabbit to sleep with.

That night, and for many nights after, the Velveteen Rabbit slept in the Boy's bed. At first he found it rather uncomfortable, for the Boy hugged him very tight, and sometimes he rolled over on him, and sometimes he pushed him so far under the pillow that the Rabbit could scarcely breathe. And he missed, too, those long moonlight hours in the nursery, when all the house was silent, and his talks with the Skin Horse. But very soon he grew to like it, for the Boy used to talk to him, and made nice tunnels for him under the bedclothes that he said were like the burrows the real rabbits lived in. And they had splendid games together, in whispers, when Nana had gone away to her supper and left the night-light burning on the mantelpiece. And when the Boy dropped off to sleep, the Rabbit would snuggle down close under his little warm chin and dream, with the Boy's hands clasped close around him all night long.

And so time went on, and the little Rabbit was very happy—so happy that he never noticed how his beautiful velveteen fur was getting shabbier and shabbier, and his tail coming unsewn, and all the pink rubbed off his nose where the Boy had kissed him.

Spring came, and they had long days in the garden, for wherever the Boy went the Rabbit went too. He had rides in the wheelbarrow, and picnics on the grass, and lovely fairy huts built for him under the raspberry canes behind the flower border. And once, when the Boy was called away suddenly to go out to tea; the Rabbit was left out on the lawn until long after dusk, and Nana had to come and look for him with the candle because the Boy couldn't go to sleep unless he was there. He was wet through with the dew and quite earthy from diving into the burrows the Boy had made for him in the flower bed, and Nana grumbled as she rubbed him off with a corner of her apron.

"You must have your old Bunny!" she said. "Fancy all that fuss for a toy!"

The Boy sat up in bed and stretched out his hands.

"Give me my Bunny!" he said. "You mustn't say that. He isn't a toy. He's REAL!"

When the little Rabbit heard that, he was happy, for he knew that what the Skin Horse had said was true at last. The nursery magic had happened to him, and he was a toy no longer. He was Real. The Boy himself had said it.

That night he was almost too happy to sleep, and so much love stirred in his little sawdust heart that it almost burst. And into his boot-button eyes, that had long ago lost their polish, there came a look of wisdom and beauty, so that even Nana noticed it the next morning when she picked him up, and said, "I declare if that old Bunny hasn't got quite a knowing expression!"