

CHAPTER 28

The Family as the School of Love

What is most valuable to you? Knowledge? Authority? Freedom? Fame? Money? These may all be important, but for most people, none of these is more valuable than their family. Is there anything more valuable than one's parents and siblings or one's spouse and children? Why do we love our family so much? Why do we like "love"? Love is what we are created for. Our family members are the nearest

people with whom we can sustain a loving relationship throughout our entire life.

The family historically has been the principal means of transmitting culture, moral and ethical principles, religious beliefs, traditions and ways of understanding the world from one generation to the next. Traditionally the family has been the way people have learned the values of personal integrity, loyalty, fidelity, and selfless love.

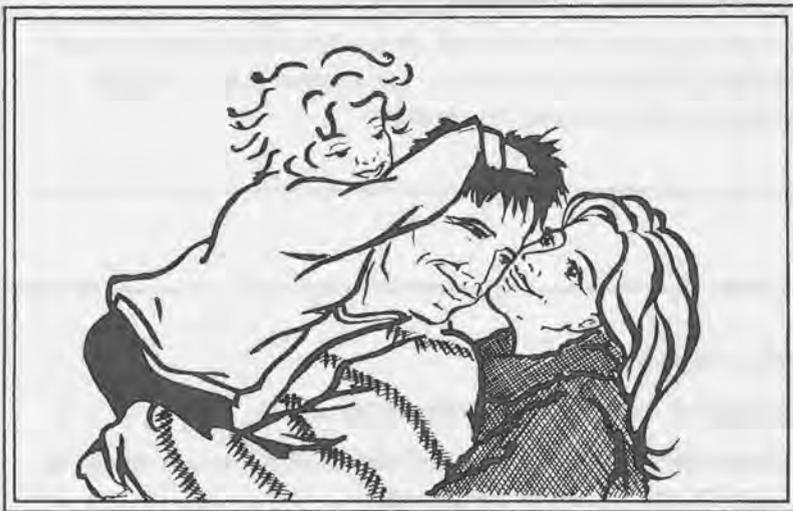
Bonds between husband and wife, parents and children, and brothers and sisters are the foundation of our life and who we are as a person. Any family

system is composed of connecting relationships. Each person is a unique part of the system. Each person not only has his own unique personality but also carries an imprint of the whole family system.

Understanding this, it is not surprising that every religion emphasizes purity, love and right relationships within the family.

Although we may certainly love our family, difficult relationships occur within our daily life with each other. Often we take out frustrations on our family. Sometimes we may feel imprisoned by their demands and expectations, although they love and accept us. Others experience very little praise from their family. At times it may be difficult to freely communicate and express our true self at home. At other times we're just out of touch with each other because

it is difficult for teenagers to understand what it's like to be a parent and parents might forget what it's like to be a teenager.



I am my family as well as whatever uniqueness I have actualized as a person.

I am an individual and group simultaneously.

My reality has been formed by my relationship with each person in the system.

The four realms of love

There are four realms of love in every family, and there is an orderly development of these realms of love. Since everyone starts as a child, we first develop a feeling of love toward our parents. Consequently the first realm of love is *children's* love. When another child is present in the family, the relationship of love between *siblings* develops. This realm of love also develops among close friends. When a man and woman mature, a new realm of love develops. They may marry and enter a *conjugal* relationship. When a husband and wife have a child, they develop the realm of *parental* love. These are the four stages of love through which each of us learns how to love.

Siblings' love and conjugal love are called horizontal, because the parties are of a similar age and position. In comparison, children's love and parental love are called vertical, because there is a difference in age and position. Horizontal love should find itself most fully expressed in the mature love between husband and wife.

As we grow from infancy through childhood, going to elementary school, middle school, high school and college, our parents remain important in our life. In children there is a natural filial piety toward our parents and respect for our elders. As brothers and sisters, we learn the meaning of friendship and cooperation. As spouses we cultivate fidelity. As parents, we develop sacrificial and unconditional love.

In the same way that we cannot attend high school until we complete elementary school—if our ability to love at each stage is not developed, we will find it difficult to love in succeeding stages. We will become a good husband or wife only when we have learned to become a good brother or sister and a good friend. In this sense, we can say that with the maturation of son's love and brotherly love (or friend's love), true husband's love is established. For example, if a boy has a good relationship with his sister, he is more likely to have a good relationship with his wife. The true husband thinks that he was born for his wife and would die for her sake. The same follows for a true wife. A husband and wife of true love and true happiness are one in love, and each lives for the sake of the other. This is an ideal couple.

We can become true parents when we have learned to be a good husband or wife. Children should be able to say, "Our parents are the best parents in the world; let's strive to have what they have." The love of true parents automatically embodies all four realms of love. To fully appreciate a deeper and higher realm of love, first we must experience the special qualities of love in relationships of the previous contexts.

So even if our parents are not perfect, we still should try to become a loving son or daughter so that we can become a better parent to our own children. If our brother or sister does not respect us, we still should respect them and what's important to them, so that we may become a husband or wife who will unconditionally love and

accept our spouse. Such a family will be one of beauty and harmony creating a happy and healthy home. You may be wondering why you should concern yourself with these matters now at such a young age, but it is important to remember that what kind of person you will be in the future depends on who you are right now.

Children's love

What kind of love does a child have? He is the essence of receptive love. A baby is aware of only his own needs and desires—to be fed and kept warm and secure. He is not at all aware of the needs of anyone else, but only demands and receives the outpourings of his parents. However, no parents complain that their baby is acting selfishly. Parents are moved by his innocence and helplessness and give their baby every-

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

— Matt. 18:1-4



thing he wants. When the baby is content, parents will beam with satisfaction.

A child's love is responsive love. Usually a child has complete faith that his parents know everything.

Children especially need direction, as their role is to learn. They are curious and filled with wonder. They need to learn how to use their powers to know, love, feel, choose and imagine. A child develops the quality of faith and trust, obedience and gratitude. He learns how to love his parents as the source of his life. As adults, we need to retain that childlike receptivity and responsiveness to truth and love.

Siblings' love

As a child grows and develops independence, he develops a sense of his own identity as well as his own point of view. He learns how to love himself as a unique and valuable person, developing conscience and the ability to decide between right and wrong. He becomes more aware of others, realizes there are different types of people, and develops empathy toward those who are different. In sibling relationships the ability to share and give grows. Brothers and sisters and friends learn mutual love, giving and receiving on an equal level. In the process of learning to live with and relate to and love others, they learn the values of honesty, commitment, sharing, cooperation and patience.

This is the stage for expanding creativity, for learning how to read and write and draw. Children learn how everything works, mechanical things and natural things. Boys fantasize about being a hero. Girls dream of marrying a handsome prince. Children always think they will be great, and at this stage nothing seems to stand in their way. This is healthy, for it expands a child's mind and gives him courage.

During our teenage years, we learn to control our impulses—our passions, anger, jealousy, greed and impatience. This is necessary so that we can establish solid relationships by acting with integrity. All of us eventually realize that our goal is to meet our spouse, and we begin to focus on the time when we will have our own true love. This is how we prepare ourselves for marriage and parenthood.



Conjugal love

At the time of marriage, a man occupies the woman's world, and a woman occupies the man's world. This is the power of true love. At this point a man and woman are ready to commit themselves completely to one another. They devote their mind, body and future to each other. This is the stage in which love truly blossoms. If you take love away from a man and woman, there is nothing that can make them unite, because they are so different.



A man and woman form a circuit of love and power flows. Electricity builds up between them. Finally, quivering with thousands of volts, they unite in a tremendous explosion, creating a huge fireball of love. This is the stage in which they can really find freedom—the freedom to love completely. Once a person decides to take full responsibility for another, he can be truly free to love that person. It is when a person's realm of love is small and self-centered that he is not free. This is the place where the freedom of love can even create new life.

Parental love

When a husband and wife give birth to a child, a whole new way of loving begins. Their whole focus is on providing the child with everything he needs. This is the beginning of learning how to love another person without expecting anything in return. Parents give and forget. If a child is sick, the parents stay up all night to take care of him.

Parents know what a child needs in order to grow and develop confidence. When a child makes a mistake, the parents don't condemn him but rather help him to see his mistake and grow. The most precious value of parents is that they want their child to be better than themselves. They want him to grow and achieve things that they only dreamed of. All parents want their child to be taller, smarter, more creative, more attractive, more loving and more resourceful. Parents cannot help but do everything they can for their children.

Within a healthy family system there are healthy roles. The parental role is mainly to model. Everyone in the family is affected by the parents' relationship. Parents should model:

- How to be a brother or sister.
- How to be a man or woman.
- How to be a husband or wife.
- How to be a father or mother.
- How to be in an intimate relationship.
- How to have good boundaries.

Today many young people grow up with only one parent. Some children who have only one parent become stronger by making the best of their situation, but the love relationship between a father and mother is not lost without consequences. A good father and mother share the same heart of love for their children, but express it differently. They have different priorities, different ways of educating and disciplining children. They establish a different kind of relationship with their children. It is important for everyone's emotional, spiritual, and psychological health and development to receive both the masculine and feminine expressions of parental love.

The palace of love

Let us consider whether members of a family can experience all the types of love that are possible within a family: children's love, siblings' love, conjugal love and parental love. In order for this to happen, the family must consist of at least three generations. Only then can all types of love be experienced and inherited.

Family Tree



In a good family the grandparents are in an important position. The parents and grandchildren should be able to naturally look up to them as the elders and to ask for advice, especially regarding family traditions and customs. In this sense the grandparents are like the guardians of the past, keepers of the treasure store of practices of their lineage. It is the grandparents' responsibility to ensure the welfare of their children and grandchildren. Children often find it easier to talk about intimate matters with their grandparents than with their parents. Grandparents can be the mediators between parents and children when there are difficulties in the relationship.



The parents are in a central position. They are masters of the present moment and conductors of the family's activities. How they exemplify love between themselves is the most essential ingredient for a happy family. If they fight, then the whole family can break down and will negatively impact the children. The parents must cultivate between them a genuine heart of love.

The children are the hope of the future for their parents and grandparents. Parents cannot live their children's lives, no matter how much guidance they may give them.

A family should be the union of three generations. Each family should examine their situation, throw away bad habits and form new, good ones. If we live for the sake of others, investing all our heart, then we not only help other people but also become more harmonious people ourselves.

The world is our family

There are millions of families in the world. Unless we are accustomed to proper relationships within the family, we cannot relate to the many different kinds of people harmoniously. The love between parents and children is vertical love. The love

between husband and wife is horizontal, as is the love between brothers and sisters. All these dimensions comprise a sphere. People who have completed the four realms of love have perfect relationships in all directions and can develop a well-rounded, balanced character and be able to relate comfortably to any kind of person. Therefore, the family is indeed the training ground of all kinds of relationships.

— We cultivate our heart through relating to grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, in-laws, nieces and nephews, grandchildren. Extended family

relationships develop our attitude toward the rest of humankind. We learn respect, loyalty, cooperation and compassion. Thus we can exhibit altruistic, unselfish love toward all members of the human family. We should feel that other people of all age groups are the extension of our family. When we see an old man on the street, we should respect him as our grandfather. When we see a middle-aged woman behind the cashier desk, we should treat her as we would our own mother or aunt; and when we see little children playing, we should feel concern for them as if they were our own younger brothers and sisters.

Other people are not nameless people whom we can mistreat, but rather our extended family. We should embrace people of all races and nationalities as our own brothers and sisters. The more embracing our love, the greater our life will be. As our family experience develops our emotional intelligence, we are led closer to our perfect self.



Family Interview

The family is the original source of values in most peoples' lives. When looking at our family's heritage we may find interesting differences and similarities when comparing past and present upbringing methods. Your homework is to interview an older family member—a parent or a grandparent—to find out what has changed and what has remained the same in the way children have been raised. How does your upbringing compare with the person's whom you interviewed? Is it similar or different? How and why?

Questions to ask:

1. What would you say were the values most strongly stressed in your upbringing?
2. Can you remember any events in your childhood that made you realize the importance of those values?
3. Do you think that the values you had were the same as most of the other children of your youth?
4. Was there ever any disagreement between you and your parents about values? How were these differences handled?
5. What values have you tried to hand down to your children? What are the major differences between your upbringing and the upbringing of your children? Why do you think things have changed?
6. What did your family like to do together?
7. What did your family quarrel about the most?
8. Who was the head of your family?

The questions below are to be answered by you after the interview:

1. Which values discussed by the person you interviewed do you consider most important? Do you think you will try to hand them down to your children? Why or why not?
2. Do you see any differences in values between you and the person you interviewed? What are they and why do you think they exist?
3. How would you characterize your family's values?

Individual Exercise



Write the names of all your family members on separate pieces of paper. Fold the papers so that the names are covered. Then pull one piece of paper out and read the name on it. This is your "beloved" for the week. For one week you should love and serve this family member, making him or her feel like the most special person in the world. Without being asked, find things to do for this person—for example, washing the dishes, walking the dog, doing the laundry—to make his or her life easier. Make little cards, write a poem, give flowers—anything that makes this person feel loved and special.

Do at least one nice thing for your beloved each day. Resolve not to fight or argue with this person for at least one week (and don't try to make up for it later!).

Notice how the attitude of your beloved changes toward you. Notice how love creates more love. Notice that no matter how much love you give, there is always more to give. You never run out.

At the end of the week choose another name from your pile and serve your new beloved with all your heart. After you have served all of the members of your family, you can ask them if they would like to try this exercise with the whole family.

If they say yes, then write everyone's name down on separate pieces of paper and have each family member pick one piece of paper. If it is their own name, they should fold their paper again and select another name. Do not let each other know whose name is on the paper. The person whose name is on your piece of paper is your beloved for the week. Serve each other secretly for two or three days without letting your beloved know who you are. After a few days, try to guess the identity of your secret admirer. Whether your family is large or small, this is a simple and fun exercise that can improve your relationships tremendously and create a wonderful atmosphere at home.

For Your Journal



- How many grandparents do you have? Pick one grandparent to write about.
- Do you see this grandparent very often?
- Where did he/she grow-up?
- Did this grandparent's mother work? If so, what did she do?
- Did this grandparent's father work? If so, what did he do?
- How many children were in his/her family?
- What do you like/admire most about this grandparent?
- Do you think his/her life at your age was similar to or different from yours? In what ways?
- What was this grandparent's favorite holiday, or thing to do?
- Do you think your parents are raising you in a way similar to the way they were raised or differently? Explain.