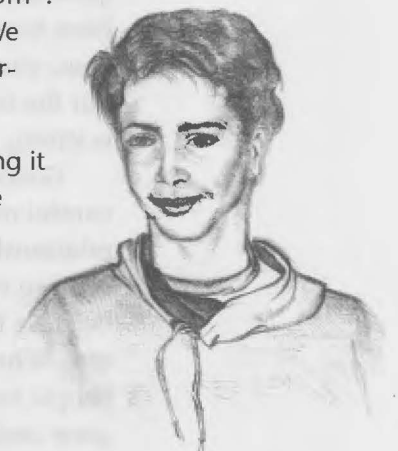


CHAPTER 44

Falling in Love, Friendship and Real Love

Growing up involves learning to distinguish between different emotions and types of love. Much more intense feelings and emotions are experienced in the teenage years. Interest in the opposite sex starts to develop. Different questions start to surface. What is love? Is there any difference between falling in love and real love? Can there be friendship between boys and girls?

- ♥ Maya is so attractive. I really like to spend time with her. The other day I invited her to go to the cafe, and she said yes. We had a great time! She definitely likes me! We walked home together and just before she left I kissed her. Perhaps it is already love?
- ♥ Three weeks ago I met a boy. He's two years older than me, very tall and handsome. I dream about him every night, imagine us going to the cinema, speaking about everything. In my dreams I'm so cool, but in reality I'm afraid even to approach him. And he doesn't pay any attention to me. What shall I do?
- ♥ I fell in love with our math teacher. It's kind of strange to speak about it, but I guess it is a kind of love. Of course, I can't imagine myself going on a date with him, but I do love him. He is so nice. And he plays the guitar! One thing is for sure—I used to hate mathematics, the classes were so incredibly boring! But this year we got our new teacher, and now math is my favorite subject. Besides, it's the only way to get his attention. Can you imagine, within a year I became top of the class in math! It's true—love creates miracles!
- ♥ I really like Rita. We have known each other almost from kindergarten. It's so great spending time together—we understand each other. But why is it that this year all our classmates have begun to tease us, calling us "bride and bridegroom"? There is nothing like that between us. We are simply friends! Why can't they understand?
- ♥ A year ago I fell in love. At the beginning it was so wonderful—I felt as if I had wings. The whole world seemed so sunny, so happy and welcoming! I felt that for the first time my heart had opened. I was able to embrace so many people. I wanted everybody to be happy like I was. And Mike also loved me. But now—I don't even know how to explain it. All my friends envy me, we still love each other, but



most of the joy has vanished! I feel so tired and exhausted. I'm afraid it was too much for both of us. The feelings are so powerful—I simply don't know how to cope with them. Is this the way love is supposed to be?

Let us try to deal with some of these questions. Can pure friendship exist between a man and a woman?

Friendship and love

When a boy and girl or a man and woman become friends, their feelings for each other do not have to grow into romantic love. It is good to realize that a person of the opposite sex is not just an object of attraction. He or she is a person with whom one can share similar interests and values.

Friends of the opposite sex can help us grow. If you can keep the relationship “platonic,” or non-sexual, and become close in the manner of a brother and sister, it can be a healthy way to prepare for marriage. We hope that our textbook can help you understand how to be friends with someone of the opposite sex in a wholesome way.

That's what Anna, now 28, recalls about her high-school friends:

I graduated from high school almost 12 years ago. So many things have happened since that time, but what is most amazing is that my classmates from high school are still my closest friends. In fact, we relate to each other not just as friends but more like family members. We went through so many things together, and now these bonds are simply unbreakable. It all began in high school. We had a very good teacher, who invested a lot in us. We spent so much time together—went hiking, traveled somewhere during all the breaks—and as a result we truly became one family.

I remember when we were 15, a whole group of girls gathered together with this teacher, asking her how to create normal relationships with boys. And the main thing she told us was that there is a way to become friends with boys without getting involved in romantic affairs. We simply need to be sincere, not afraid to appreciate them, to notice and encourage them when they try to do something for us—even if it turns out to be clumsy. A simple piece of advice, but it did help. And now, even though we have our own jobs, families and children, and as a result don't see each other too often, still each one of us is sure—if something happened and help were needed, all of us would be together again.

Friendship begins with liking: a spontaneous feeling of enjoyment that is different from love. Liking may grow into affection, the feeling of love. Finally, affection may become the kind of love that shares the joy and pain in life. These are friends who grow to love each other, who share thoughts and values, and help each other out. Even though you may not like everything about your friend or everything he or she does, you like to be together. As in any relationship, friendships are not always easy, but the bad times can actually bring friends closer together if their love for each other is strong.

Good friends can always be trusted and relied upon. Nevertheless, one should be careful not to become possessive. Possessing and being possessed never allow a secure relationship to develop. Friendship means sharing. Friends do not start taking or owning what is freely given. High school is a time to build many new friendships, because this should be a time to grow in relating with many types of people, not just one. When young people become more secure in themselves, they can let other people be themselves and appreciate others for who they are. Then their friendships grow and become more enjoyable.



First love

Most of us have known someone in whom we see only what's good. No matter what others may tell us or even if we try to analyze that person's qualities intellectually, we see only radiance and beauty. With such a person, we feel happy and uplifted. When this person is someone of the opposite sex, we may refer to this experience as having a "crush." It is a non-sexual kind of love that we may experience toward many different kinds of people. We are capable of experiencing this love as early as 5 years old, but it seems to be more common once we reach our preteen and teenage years.

The specific qualities of such a love are most commonly respect, admiration, devotion, and surrender. Based on the openness of the heart, we are able to be more loving through the admiration for our "idol," thereby taking in the very qualities we love and admire in that person. This kind of love can be a good thing when it doesn't become exclusive. Having experienced this feeling in one person's presence, we long to find it in another. As we search for it, we are seeking (says Plato) the *ideal* of beauty and goodness that makes us feel most fulfilled as human beings.

We soon realize that having "crushes" is just a stage that we all go through. It doesn't and shouldn't last. Later at some point in our lives we experience the wonder of "first love." This awakening of our heart and emotions for one person is very beautiful. It stirs up powerful feelings and thoughts that we have never experienced before. It's very romantic, but it's far from reality. Usually when we experience such a feeling for the first time, we are in love with an image we have created and projected onto another person. Perhaps it's akin to the feelings of Tatiana Larina that the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin wrote about in his epic poem *Eugene Onegin*:

Thou comest oft in visions to me;
Wert dear, although I knew not thee;
Thy tones reverberate through me;
Thy gaze absorbed, enchanted me
Long since... But no, I was not dreaming!
Straight, when thou comest, not in seeming,
I knew thee, I took fire, stood numb,
And my heart told me: "He is come".

This feeling of first love is very beautiful at the beginning. We want to change and become the best we can be to be worthy of love. It is a time when we are unselfish and open to other people.

Step by step we become more and more involved in the relationship as it becomes more and more real. We begin to discover that the person with whom we are in love is a real human being. We either are disappointed that the reality has turned out to be different from our dreams, or we feel hurt because our beloved doesn't love us back. When the love is mutual—the bond becomes stronger and stronger, and at some point we begin to realize that the feelings are becoming too intense and difficult to control. If it reaches the point at which love ceases to be a source of happiness, we feel exhausted and trapped in a relationship.

First love is not bad, but sometimes the time is not right. Ideally we should

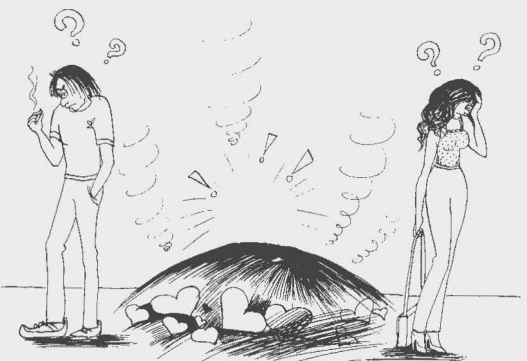
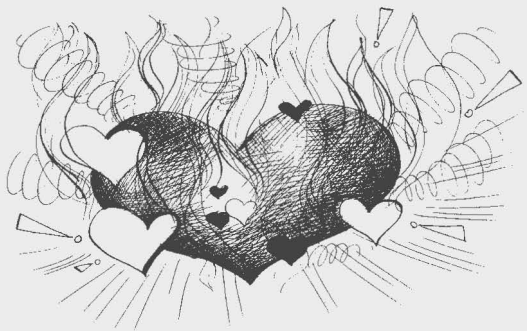
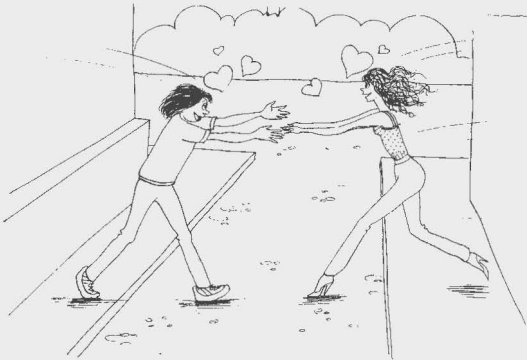
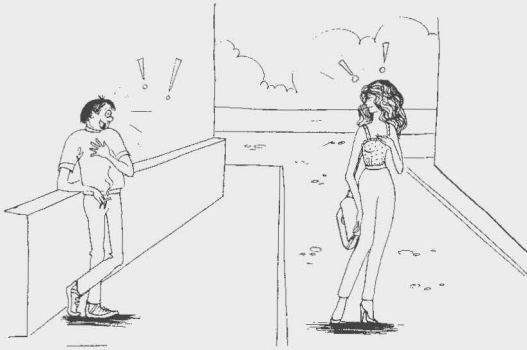
experience this first love with the person we plan to marry, because it is an unforgettable experience. If we experience this first love when we are already mature, it can become the happiest experience of our life, leading to marriage. If we become involved too early, then instead of happiness it may bring feelings of resentment and other consequences with which we'll need to deal for many years afterward. Therefore, it is best to avoid becoming emotionally involved with someone of the opposite sex at an early age.

Premature bonding

Adolescence is the time when the separation between children and parents is taking place. In this final stage of autonomy we experience loneliness, which sensitizes us to the need for comfort. Pain is often a result of loneliness that we are so desperately trying to escape. It is time when teenagers want nothing more than to be accepted by the surrounding world. However, instead of building loving and sincere friendships, young people often end up falling in love. Many believe that "falling in love" is "real love". This is not true. It may feel so overwhelming as to be real. It feels like someone has unleashed our desire for heaven on earth. But love is more than feelings. Feelings are only one component of love. Insights, decisions, and caring actions are also included. Truly getting to know someone, understanding and loving another person, takes time. People have many sides to their character, personality and potential. This is why love at first sight is not real love but simply an attraction.

From a psychological point of view, one of the greatest problems with teenagers falling in love is that a young man and woman tend to merge their personalities before they have had a chance to form their own identity as persons. This is called premature bonding. Bonding is heightened in the emotional hothouse of sexual intimacy. The bonding of marriage is fine for two mature persons who are able to merge their personalities while maintaining their own individuality. But for young people who are still forming an identity, falling in love is usually an act of regression.

They are obsessed with the beloved, who are at the center of their thoughts at all times. Concentration on studies becomes difficult. They strongly prefer to be with their special boy or girl rather than anybody else. Nobody else exists who is even remotely comparable in terms of importance. Everybody else fades into insignificance. Consequently the immature couple may isolate themselves from family and friends, spending hours on the telephone or in each other's company. There is an enormous longing for closeness. They may short-circuit all the other important ways that they need to develop as they pour themselves into this intense relationship. This passion makes it easy for them to cross the line and become sexually intimate. Their love is very self-centered. It does not radiate and enrich all who come into contact with the couple. As one young man said, "I have a friend who's having sex with his girlfriend, and that's all they ever focus on. Their relationship is real narrow."



Eventually, reality intrudes upon the seemingly fantastic unity of the couple who have fallen in love. Sooner or later, in response to the problems of daily life, one's individuality will reassert itself. He wants to have sex; she doesn't. She wants to go to the cinema; he doesn't. She doesn't like his friends; he doesn't like hers. Both of them in the privacy of their heart come to the realization that they are not one with each other. The beloved has and will continue to have his or her own desires, tastes, and prejudices that differ from one's own. The couple are not mature enough to respect and accept each other's differences but are threatened by them. The work involved in balancing those differences becomes more and more difficult. They "fall out of love."

Self-actualized love

One of the most prominent authorities on love in recent years was the psychologist Abraham Maslow. In his studies on self-actualized people (people who are living more to their full potential in life) Maslow described some of the ideal qualities of love.

The primary quality he found was self-sufficiency. According to his observations, self-sufficiency is the basis for love in the successful relationships of self-actualized people:

Self-actualizing people don't need each other as do ordinary lovers. They can be extremely close yet go apart quite easily. ... Throughout the most intense and ecstatic love affairs, these people remain themselves and remain ultimately masters of themselves as well, living by their own standards even though enjoying each other intensely. ... The ego is in one sense merged with another, but yet in another sense remains separate and strong as always.

In this kind of love, both partners have the freedom to remain fully themselves even as they share the experience of love.

Real love is a choice

Building a true and lasting relationship requires real work. Growing in love requires self-sacrifice, responsibility and great effort. Whereas "falling in love" is effortless—we simply "fall" into it—real love requires an individual to exercise one's will and extend oneself beyond one's limits. Real love purposely nurtures one's own spiritual development as well as another's. Falling in love does not.

When we have fallen in love, we do not feel the need to develop. We are totally content to be where we are. We also tend to idealize the person we "love."

We want to believe that there is nothing wrong with that person. If we detect shortcomings, we perceive them as insignificant or even attractive—little quirks or darling eccentricities that only add color and charm.

When desires and feelings rule our lives and dictate the quality of our existence, we are not experiencing genuine love. We are dominated by our feelings and have surrendered our will.



Real love, as well as involving feelings, is also an act of will and implies choice. If a mother loved her child only when she felt like loving, what would happen to that love when her child angered, disappointed, or embarrassed her? Her disturbed feelings could replace her affectionate feelings. But a mother's love is stronger than her hurt or upset feelings. If love depended only on feelings, it would be very unstable.

We do not *have* to love. We *choose* to love. It is important to grasp this principle in light of all the propaganda suggesting that love is an uncontrollable feeling that comes and goes like the wind. Most of the plots of novels, films and television are based on the premise that love is a feeling that just happens—or doesn't happen.

The truth is that love means living for the sake of another. We can love people whom we do not like. We can love people even when they do things we do not like. Love means extending ourselves for the benefit of another person. This can be quite painful, since it may mean denying our own wishes for the sake of the one we are loving. But when we love in this way, we do not count the cost.

This principle corrects a common misconception, namely, that love is easy and requires neither thought nor effort. According to this belief, love does not have to be learned, but instead is simply a matter of doing what comes naturally! Many hearts have been broken because of this misunderstanding. In reality, learning to love takes time and requires patience. This patience can save you from making mistakes that may result in indelible painful memories.

Love is an art to be learned and a discipline to be maintained. The art of loving can be compared to any discipline. Once a person masters the basic techniques of art or music, he finds that he has greater freedom to express his creativity. The same is true for love. As we mature in our ability to love, we gain greater freedom in the expression of our love. We are free to express love more spontaneously because it is selfless and unconditional. Everything we think, feel and do is an expression of true love—of living for the sake of others.

For Your Journal



Concepts about love

In a peaceful place with background music, read the following statements and questions. Close your eyes and think about each one before reading the next one. Then begin writing in your journal:

1. Write a definition of love. Also write something about what love is not.
2. Compare and contrast the experiences of “falling in love” and real love.
3. Describe an experience in which you felt loved by your mother or by a mother-figure who took care of you.
4. Describe your love for some object or activity.
5. Describe an experience in which you felt loved by your father or by a father-figure who took care of you.
6. Describe an unfulfilling experience of love.
7. How am I genuinely expressing or extending love to myself?
8. How am I genuinely expressing or extending love to others?
9. Where am I dissatisfied with my present state of loving?
10. What old beliefs or messages about love do I need to give up in order to develop the ability to love truly?

After you finish answering these questions, think of someone to whom you would like to write a letter (it could also be yourself or even God). Tell that person what you would like to change about your relationship. You may write a dialogue as well. Be creative.

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



To read

“Sixteen”, by Maureen Daly, in *The Art of Loving Well*