

What Is Love? Here's What to Know

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Human love is passionate by default, as in "being in love."

Poets and novelists intuit love as a most delightful phenomenon of highly personal and deeply intimate relationships. Love begets new belongings and makes life worth living. Thus, human love is rather virtuous.

Unification leaders talk a lot about love, that is, about God's love and true love. Human love, however it may be implied, is usually not distinguished as a worthwhile virtue. This may have resulted in many Unificationist offspring seeking love outside their parent's faith community.

More clarity and an appreciative attitude toward human love may help Unificationists to better reach out to a world full of smart and curious young folks.



Tom Froehlich

Surely love -- passionate as it always is -- cannot arise without mutual attraction and be nothing less than profound affection and some esteem for each other. Reciprocal and non-exploitative, love eventually kindles surrender due to enchantment and thus delight in each other, both in body and mind so as to not leave anyone wanting.

Yes, that is a lot to ask of love.

Does love happen all the time, always to its fullest, and everywhere to everyone? No. Just imagine what a young, single male living with his parents in an Alaskan village of 187 people has to figure to make love come true for him. Or what about that single, middle-aged mother working as a street vendor in New Delhi, India? Can she worry about anything else than how to feed herself and her child?

Realistically, love seems to be out of reach or otherwise not feasible for a whole lot of folks on Planet Earth.

Forsaken Delights

Nevertheless, it is not just a safe, new belonging that people seek, but also the delights of a passionate love -- often rather secretly.

There aren't that many delights to be had while "being loved" or "being cared for" by either a mate or a deity. Such one-sided love induces shame after all. More delights are found in the undisturbed act of reciprocal and non-exploitative loving between a man and a woman. That is to say, "being in love" with another in both mind and body is truly exhilarating!

And yet, love and its delights are also regularly dismissed, forgone, or forsaken as being too indulgent, unsafe, impractical, or inconsequential. Often, the themes of sex and family dominate the center stage of life. Love is then viewed as a risky extravagance, even for people living in privileged circumstances, and rather kept under wraps.

The prevailing cases of men abusing dependent women do not help to install confidence in love, either. However, women know how to have it their way as well.

Not to be Taken for Granted

A love surely can also be short-lived. Some folks, man and woman, go intentionally only for the cherry on the cake and then move on from each other. That is not us.

Having outgrown bouts of romantic love during teenage years, most people seek a stable, long-time relationship and understand that real love relationships are not to be taken for granted. That does not sound very romantic, but life is such that there appears to be no "gain without pain."

Finding the right mate then amounts for the cautious to settle for a Mr. Right or a Ms. Perfect with whom it is probable to "double the gain by halving the pain." The more daring, however, try to find the elusive One within whom to delight, as well as with whom the journey of life promises to be delightful. That is, regardless of gains or pain!

And yes, there are gazillions of fairly happy couples out there in the world, no matter their race or religion.

Revealing Itself

Love does not necessarily reveal itself by virtue of a fancy diamond ring or elaborate marriage ceremony, but rather by the small, almost trivial, and yet delicate gestures in daily life. Of many vanilla "things" being equal -- as in biceps and bosoms -- what people probably find so charming about the other, so lovable, are the many nuanced demeanors only perceptible on close-up.

There is that twinkle of the eye, the pitch of laughter when caught off-guard. What about the rush of emotions when being touched accidentally? Or the resolve or lack thereof regarding much about nothing, in private? All of it making him or her so unique, so charming, and so endearing.

In other words, we admire but do not love another for his or her virtues, and we cannot come to love another without being privy to his or her vices -- if ever so few. In love, we do not have to play a role -- although we can, we do not have to put on a show -- although we can. In love, each one reveals him or herself as he or she is. In love, each one cares for the other more than for him or herself -- perhaps for the first and only time in life. Daring as it may seem, this is virtuosity par excellence.

The few words of a text like these musings cannot aptly describe the love that people are secretly longing for. Nothing can substitute for the actual experience of love, not the reading of cheap romance novels or the secret viewing of erotic videos.

More Perspectives on Love

Otherwise, the phenomenon of love resists a neatly comprehensive, all-inclusive formulation.

North African theologian and bishop Augustine said that love is a craving; empiricist David Hume said that it is a passion we suffer. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud said that we extend instinctual affection to those who care for us. Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said that love is the sex instinct veiled by Mother Nature and thus entirely an illusion.

Phenomenologist Max Scheler said that love is a felt emotion and at the center of many types of feelings. Psychologist Robert Trivers stated that love is a mechanism acquired by humans in order to reproduce and to keep children alive. Matchmakers say that coupled intimates will surely love each other once they had sex.

Fearlessness is what love seeks, said philosopher Hannah Arendt. Thinker and writer Simone de Beauvoir said that love better be authentic, that is reciprocal and non-exploitative. Mother Theresa, a woman of faith, said that love is not without benevolence for another and charity for most all.

Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck said that love is about giving yourself and the other person what is needed to grow. Family advocates say that love alone is unsafe. Playwright William Shakespeare and countless poets and novelists say in their prose that "love is not a child's play."

1 Corinthians 13:1 says that "love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

Social scientists say that love surely has a strong biological basis. This basis is undoubtedly worked on by cultural norms to shape the person. The importance of one's own volition in the processes of love and life must be noted as well.

Perspectives are not necessarily wrong. By definition, they are just never complete and therefore anyone's perspective is not really the last word.



A TEDed talk discussing "What is love?"

Love Unfolds and Folds Over Time

Other than that, love is experienced not only in an ephemeral moment -- but that also perhaps of just having fallen in love. Love is experienced not only as a seasonal episode -- that of being in love, but also as a decades-long or even life-long affair. Love takes time to develop as each lover also struggles, nevertheless, for control over his or her spot in that relationship. There is a constant back and forth, an ongoing orientation process as two lovers can never merge into just one, other than in that minute erotic climax.

Too many Hollywood movies end when the two actors finally, and against all odds, confess their love and drive off into the sunset or over the cliff.

Younger folks may look forward to "falling in love" and "to be in love." However, trying to find love in old age is a real stretch and a theme of little interest for Hollywood. With increasing age, people are likely to lose a bit of that delicious "tenderness of youth." Youthfulness beckons for love to bond, while not resisting life to flow.

Between "falling in love" and "falling out of love," or love having no end in sight or love just slowly petering out, or love being medicated by a deity or love being treasured over distances, love also endures the follies and frailties of ever-changing epochs.

Real love may have its beginnings as a romantic and/or erotic affair. Perhaps love kindles after years of only friendship between two, or after an arranged marriage started to bear fruit (kids). Who is to tell?

Again, love maturing is an affair that unfolds over time, and that love -- amazingly -- can also last! And while love endures, it does so not without appearing in various stages and intensities. From romantic love to real love to true love, from a passing inclination to a vehement passion to friendship, love nevertheless permeates as hot or passionate, warm or friendly, and cold or empty. Over time, the "color" of love will change as passionate love is hardly the same for young and old.

Interests Regarding Love

One might say that love is not even the same for a man and a woman. This is a dicey topic, for sure. It may be so that men and women have different interests regarding sex and family, and that makes the "feeling" of love different for people. Some interests are often in sync -- like interests in kids and family, others perhaps not always -- like interests in sex. Sadly, women have said that men cannot love, and men -- to that point -- have said that women are useful.

To avoid these unpleasanties from potential conflict, lots of single people -- including men -- are looking for a "soulmate," that is a soulmate love or relationship. In such a relationship, both mates deeply value or "love" a shared common ground first, before each other -- that is before they must eventually face each other as well. That common ground often is a religion, with its prescribed beliefs and behaviors. A lesser

ground may be a shared affinity for a hobby or even a shared aversion to certain attitudes.

Arranged marriages are not based on the exclusive interests of the two candidates as both are asked to submit to considerable degrees to the interests of parents, etc. As if love could simply be arranged as well. On the other hand, there is no reason why prospective mates cannot choose to honor overarching parental interests as their own common ground, with their relationship then becoming a kind of soulmate relationship. Younger singles especially may benefit from a supportive involvement of parents and elders regarding lasting love.

It seems that the Unification movement, with its emphasis on the Marriage Blessing, is trying to work out an appealing and sustainable model of intimate, conjugal relationships. By now promoting the practices of modern courtship, it avoids the typical pitfalls associated with luck of the draw, as well as fatuous love and glorious individualism.

Well-lived Lives

And yes, flatlined love is not the end; it can be rejuvenated if one or both are willing to abandon cold routines and other causes of contempt. As such, lasting love is not so much a thing two people aim for, but a by-product of well-lived lives together. Arguably, well-lived lives and their loves do not settle on the prescribed, the meticulously organized, or the secretly intentioned. And that is what makes well-lived lives so exceptional.

Kinds of Love Experienced

"Kinds of love" is obviously metaphorical speech, with each kind necessarily blending into others. Nevertheless, what all these kinds of love have in common, with the exception of narcissism, is a sentimental and significant encounter with another human being. People of all cultures recognize the power of love, if to different extents. Kinds of love weave people's lives together over time. And that then helps to generate much of contemporary morality here and there. Thus, love is what makes the world go 'round.

However, love is not child's play. Yet children may grow up dismayed when attention to great sex or religious duties far outweigh any affective, tender love between mom and dad.

What matters to people most, however, is perhaps how they actually experience love in life. There are delights to be had in any kind of love, even in unrequited love. In the end, people do not care so much about where love comes from or what love is, but simply what love promises. Marriage is not the real issue, it is love -- or its absence.

In Praise of Love

In his essay *In Praise of Love*, French philosopher Alain Badiou makes the case for love being an answer to loneliness. To Badiou, love creates a lasting interdependency between and changes the outlook on life for the lovers. Love, then, creates unpredictably new belongings and is an antidote to social engineering. That is to say, caste systems, monarchies and aristocratic lineages are fearful of love. While arranged marriages are still a norm in many present-day cultures, there is no such thing as arranged love.

In his enlightening book *On Love*, Spanish essayist Jose Ortega y Gasset points out that "what exists in love is surrender due to enchantment." This insight presupposes an often-unnoticed distinction between "love" (as a noun), "loving" (as a verb), and "being in love" (as a state of the psyche).

Love itself charms or beckons for the involuntary surrender of the beloved. Being in love, then, is one of love's ultimate achievements: the surrender of an innermost realm of psyche due to enchantment. That is not to mean submission due to coercive duty or obligation.

Exclusiveness

This "free from" shame and "free to" surrender generates a natural exclusiveness in a genuinely fulfilling love relationship. That is because -- let's face it -- one surrenders to another as deeply and delightfully as love is allowed to uproot one's psyche. Can one really be in passionate love with two or three others to the same degree, at the same time? There, then, is only the "One."

Unfortunately, from the outside, from the point of view of rivals, a delightful love may be looked at with envy and then some. And from the inside, such love is then protected with jealousy. This speaks to the situation of "love being unsafe." Whatever one possesses, another will seek.

But it is not love that is unsafe, it is more likely that people are unsafe. Love is just an easy scapegoat. And yes, gated communities of, for, and by like-minded seem to make life a bit safer -- for those behind

the physical or mental fence.

The Future of Love

It appears that there is, around the world, a turn toward passion being more positively regarded and yearned for more intensely than ever before. Even in Asian cultures, generally understood to be more collectivist than individualistic, love now begins to assert its distinctiveness next to the themes of sex, family and lineage. That is, fewer people are willing to marry someone whom they do not love.

Obviously, with that freedom of choice comes the possible anguish inherent in making choices and then owning them. All that bears on our past, current and future understanding of love.

Mindful Enough

Neanderthals and Denisovans were probably sensitive enough to "make affectionate love" when "nature called," but were they already mindful enough to "make love" out of "being in love?" That is, not just out of a rut but out of being fascinated by and realizing pure delight in the other's mind and body? Would they already have even only an inkling of love -- something more than just bare liking motivated by physical arousal? What about Adam and Eve?

Love is not an absolute but a human construct that is dependent on time, place and culture. Passionate human love is still a kind of rebel in a world largely organized as a patriarchy that tries to keep women in their place. Can passionate love, reciprocal and non-exploitative between a real man and a real woman, make the world go 'round?

Tom Froehlich and his wife, Christine, participated in the 1982 Marriage Blessing at Madison Square Garden in New York City. His website, from which this article is based, is [TrueLove.Singles](#). Tom hopes to stimulate discussion regarding the virtues of human love and invites readers to join in on blogging on this site.

Painting at top: Detail from "Cupid and Psyche" by François Gérard (1798); Louvre Collection, Paris.