

On Love, Respect and Connectedness

An Analysis

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Love does not exist as an entity. It is an attribute or a feature of connectedness, a feature that distinguishes a particular form of connectedness. It is not a something but an attitude, a quality, so that one can only describe the characteristics of it. Love comes from the heart and is sometimes simple, sometimes long lasting and sometimes over very soon. The head, thinking about it, can and often does make it complicated, so complex in fact that it is never over or never gets started. Love is not a fixed state, something that one has and owns. Rather, it varies in intensity from time to time. Because the insides of people swirl about with so many conflicting feelings and emotions, one must have some kind of theory of love or he will get lost. It must be a theory of loving that goes beyond "being in love." It must get away from a problem orientation despite the fact that problems are easier to talk about than love.

Love is an active process that goes beyond problem solving. One must be cautious. Love is an emotion and to analyze it would surely kill it off. Since it is a quality, it cannot be separated into parts or basic principles, its nature cannot be determined methodically. There are many pseudo forms of love, such as the type that occurs between an analyst and his patient. An analyst deserves respect but not love in a genuine sense. It is possible that a person can get "all talked out and emotionally drained" with his therapist and have little of his inner self to tell others about. The result is less closeness with other people in his family. Such analysis can be overdone and can result in fifty reasons for, and thirty reasons against, love. You start out loving a person and you feel it. Then you begin to think about analysis, training, diversions and issues that explain everything. Little notice is

given to the damage that is done with the best of motivation. But is that love? Is it the administration of a therapist? Is it the modeling of therapy wherein everything is accepted, a model that the family cannot possibly live up to and that makes the family look bad?

Context

The context surrounding any event, issue, person or object determines the characteristics that are elicited. The context that one is in specifies, leads up to, defines and follows the meaning of the particular expression of love. The context of love between a father and a daughter is different than the context of love between a father and a mother. The circumstances in which these particular events occur are different. Love happens in context and, because it is an emotion and a quality, it cannot be approached directly. There must be some common ground, and due to the uniqueness of each individual, some ground not in common. The context can influence but cannot create love. People in a context can do things which are more or less conducive to letting it bloom or die.

As an emotion and a quality I can work on my expression of love. As a process love demands that both people experience it. The setting of love varies in many ways. It is always larger than a twosome. While two people are in a room together, unseen people from the extended family, network, friends and former spouses and children perch on the shoulders of that twosome and wander like ghosts throughout the room, strongly influencing the context. Wife speaks to husband and sees her father perched on his shoulder, laughing and saying, "You thought

you could get away from me. But look, you married a man just like me."

The context may vary to the extent that it is wide or narrow. Before women entered the work force in such numbers, and even today, men often operated from a wider base than women. Their everyday life experience in their work and culture tends to cover more space. Smaller events or signs of love tend to assume larger importance and make larger waves when the base is simpler or smaller. A man may expect sexual love right after an argument. To enlarge her base, a woman's emotional set toward physical love may rest on how she felt treated during the entire day. A wave in the ocean is not even noticed. A wave in a pan full of dishes may cause a small flood. The setting of love may be influenced by expectations that arise from the titles and positions of the people who are involved. Certainly love between husband-wife, parent-child, child-parent, adult child-parent and friend-friend is different and strongly modified by different expectations. The context of love is influenced by the definition of love and the expectations that flow from that definition. It is important to have people give their own definition of love. This exposes expectations, common ground, myth, culture, extended family influences, differences, etc. For example, some people believe that love in the marital relationship comes first, before love of children. Man said, "I am me, an angry person. When I give myself to my wife, I give my anger too. That is part of my love."

The context of love is also influenced by the manner of showing it. Some people believe the physical aspects of love are the most important and omit the more personal elements. Others underplay the sexual-physical part. As therapists, when people are feeling empty and in despair about loving or being loved or when they are bickering with each other to avoid that empty despair, we often try to get them to talk about their courtship, how they met, etc., to change the context. We try to restore the feeling of romantic love. Over time, the good times of love tend to fade from recall as love loses its fantasy in the fact of reality. "Do you have to slurp your coffee every morning?" As we try to change the context, hopefully more loving aspects of self will emerge.

Love In General

The remarks that follow are descriptive, an attempt to transmit a mental image or impression with words rather than an explanation. The description is not necessarily true but does come from observations of people.

There are different forms and intensities of love. These include marital love, the idealization of a dead parent, the love of a mother for a child, the dawning love of young adults for their parents as they become parents, and the admiration of a child for his seemingly omnipotent father. Adults want love as much as children do. The form of showing love varies from situation to situation. Many problems are created in families because of the mistaken notion that "because adults are grown," they either "have it or should have it." Children and the elderly are more easily seen as needing love, with those in between less in need. This is part of the reason why families tend to disintegrate at the point of the marital bond. None of these varying forms of love are states of existence. They are tests which bring out the assets and liabilities in self. None of these varying forms of love is the cause of problems. A new baby tests the kind and amount of mothering love in the mother and the marital love with her husband. Just as parent-child love differs from husband-wife love, the love of a friend spreads the process out into a network that surrounds the family. This more general, less special form of love is necessary for the family and each member of the family.

Love is like a strong rubber band that keeps people moving toward each other. It must always be tested to see if the elasticity is there and the repeated stretching of the rubber band reinforces it's elasticity. It can't be judged or believed in without the experience of stretching. It can't be predicted or quantified. It requires work and a surrounding network. The stretching gives rise to questions such as, "Do I love him and what are the limitations of love? If he doesn't love me, can I live with it?" Love can't be proven, it must be experienced. People can't really explain why they picked a certain spouse beyond the usual reasons of physical attraction, same values, common religion and race, etc. These criteria fit millions of people

and I have never heard a satisfactory answer to the question, "Why did you select your spouse?" Clinically, when you ask people to define love, they often compare the person to their extended family and talk of the "expectations of the other if I love him." It is often as if expectations of the other equals loving the other.

People want to be with each other, to love and be loved. As they move closer together, a hyper focus on responsibility may exclude tenderness. The stages of love go back and forth from romance to distance and emptiness, to sustaining love and then back again. The process is neither consistent nor static. The process takes time and includes missing the other and interest in the person of the other, not just what he/she has to say. There are questions of commitment which remain unanswered. If one is too committed or is committed for life, he tends to be taken for granted. After all, he will always be there. If there is little or no commitment, the relationship will snap with the least of stress. The commitment must be long enough to be significant but not so long that one can be taken for granted. Clinically, I ask people to commit themselves to the other for periods varying from three to six months to a few years.

Religion helps people to make a long lasting commitment to a relationship, but this can be a trap too. It can keep people in a dead relationship long after the death has been recognized. Love is both an inner and an outer dependency, an inner emotion and an outer object or person. Dependency is not a bad word. In life we are all interdependent. Though interdependent, we do not have to lose ourselves in the process.

Love does not mean pleasing others or agreement. It does mean that the personal relationship precedes the physical-sexual one. A mother can love a child with no sexual connotations. Clinical experience indicates that there is no such thing as a sexual problem unless it be a physical one or a minor educational one. The sexual part is invariably a concretization of the absence of a personal relationship. Love is influenced by the memory of the past, childhood, therapists, former spouse, parents, etc. It is not unusual for someone to remain "in love" with the first

love of one's life during the teen years. This can lead to fantasy comparisons later in life.

Love takes us away from the concepts of sickness, problem solving and pathology into the philosophy of living. It is a human desire to be universally loved. But that is impossible since it would require one to be a chameleon, taking on the coloration of those he is with. Such a person becomes a no self. I always figure that when I say something, a few people will love it, a few will hate it and the vast majority couldn't care less. They are too busy pursuing their own goals.

Finally, love is always associated with hurt. Hurt is inevitable since human beings have bad days and their function fluctuates.

Romantic Love

"Love is a thing to be learned. It is a difficult, complex maintenance of individual integrity throughout the incalculable process of interhuman polarity." (D.H. Lawrence). Romantic love can be defined as imaginative but impractical, fictitious, mysterious and not based on fact or reality. It is exciting, adventurous, idealized and often based on a strong, short-lived attachment. It is a socially acceptable deception and delusion and thus a form of insanity. Romantic love is a feeling and, as such, is always reactive to something inside of me but usually to something outside of me, to another person. It contains strong elements of fusion, a blending of one person into the other, a sense of togetherness, a longing to be one and complete. "We are ... we do ... we feel ..." Love songs are full of the words of romantic love. "We can build a stairway to the stars." "Heaven is being with you." "When I love, I smile. Everything shines." "Smoke gets in my eyes." "The feeling is indescribable." "I hurt when you hurt." "I can't live without you." Such feelings are an expression and not factual. Most talk of love is about romantic love, my first child, my idealized father, my saintly mother, my unique spouse. This is a case of being in love, rather than love. All too often one is in the state of "being in love" with a fantasy. It can get to the point of becoming an obsession. "I can't live without you." It is experienced as a need and not a want. This fusion is fueled by hope. As long as there is hope that there is someone outside of me that will make me complete,

fusion or the tendency to fuse with the other will occur.

As romantic love comes into contact with reality, cracks begin to appear. It is extremely vulnerable. Romantic love tends to be conditional. "I will if you...." This often implies "I won't if you don't." The result can be paralysis in which one waits for the other to move first. The devotion of one to the other and the hope of completion in a "We-ness" can demand that one person gives up his self and transfers it to the other to preserve the togetherness. The person who gives up self will eventually become a hollow, boring shell, become emotionally or physically disabled, or stage an angry revolution that tears the romance apart.

Self can be lost because romantic love depends strongly on agreement and differences are poorly tolerated. All of this adds up to the facade that love is a two-way street. This unreal expectation belies the fact that any twosome is often out of sync in their wants, inner emotional climate and the amount of stress they are under at any given time. Pressure is also increased by the fact that everybody comes from a different extended family (even if you grow up in the same family). One tends to get his level of expectation of others from the parent he is closer to, and his emptiness from the parent he is more distant from. Also the view of a child and a mother can be strikingly different about the same man wearing different hats. The hat of a father or the hat of a husband. People in romantic love can be so close that they don't see or know each other. They can't see the forest for the trees. They see what they want to see and miss the overview. In extreme cases, networks are cut off and the world becomes a twosome. Can a mother and a son see each other objectively? Don't we all see neighbor's children better than our own? Such an investment of one's own self in the other is very risky, and the same in return is expected. Everything must be a two-way street. Such a relationship inevitably becomes suffocating to one or both. The inevitable inconsistency of romantic love leads to distance and bickering, and eventually one becomes the pursuer, desperately trying to maintain the fusion of romantic love, and one becomes the distancer, protecting self from rejection.

The very excitement of romantic love makes it a hard act to maintain and follow. Over time, the peaks of excitement become harder to reach and the ensuing lows deeper and longer in duration. In the small base of the twosomes trying to get everything out of each other, everything becomes important, small issues tend to become magnified. We know that hate and love are opposite sides of the same coin. In such intensity, and with such a small base for the emotional climate, love may be expressed by projected hate from self and of self. Deceptions become apparent. Self deception: "I knew he drank before I married him but I thought I could change him." Deception by others: "Before we married he pursued me and even bothered me. Now he pays no attention to me." We are all liable to misjudgments. The distancer can put on a burst of energy and appear to pursue ardently for some time. Eventually his tendency to distance emerges. As the excitement wears off and romantic love dies down, overt problems ensue. One tells the other what to do, blames other and excuses self, holds others responsible for feelings in self. Hurt is more difficult to forgive and is never forgotten. Efforts at forgiveness stifle acceptance. There is a loss of the view that closeness implies hurt, and distance implies loneliness.

As times goes on, hope fades into hopelessness, fusion into bickering and distance. Romantic love is based on reactive feelings. These feelings are important since they are the small talk of life, a large part of the bridge between people. Now, even small talk begins to fade and be replaced by issues, arguments over responsibility, episodes remembered for their resentment and carefully nurtured hurt. Ghosts of the past intrude on the twosome. "My father is dead and I wish he were here to talk. I wanted to be a different mother than my own mother and yet I find myself doing the same thing. My spouse is not what I thought she would be. Am I to blame? At first life was so simple and clear. The purpose was to get married, have children, pay for the car, get a profession and a house. Now we have them and they have not delivered what I thought. Something is missing. What is it?" Feelings and their tendency to fuse bind the relationships into

romantic love which is doomed to break and lead to emptiness.

The time involved in this transition can vary from one day to many years. One can be distracted in realizing this change since the young family can become very busy raising children and starting out economically. Some are blind to the demise of romantic love until they have a child and then begin to appreciate their own parents. During the transition, some people get stuck on their expectations, avoid the emptiness within them and pursue angry fusion, pursuit and distance. Others make the transition rather easily over many years. Many twosomes triangle to try to preserve the relationship. Others break off the relationship. In therapy, we see people who are stuck in the transition and one of our problems as therapists is that we have to try to accomplish in a relatively short period of time the same result that ordinarily happens slowly over many years. The layers of bitterness may be so entrenched that the changeover is impossible.

For some people, the death of romantic love is the death of love. One woman said, "I grew up understanding that I could depend on my family. After my parents died, I wanted to depend on my husband. Then I was devastated and realized my husband would never be my parents. So I withdrew alone. I reached to others but it did not work. There was no peace, even in prayer. I finally converted to God and away from people. No one seemed to have what I wanted." A husband said, "She is hard to love for more than short periods. She does not understand that I have to make a living. I never pushed her away." A grandfather said, "I can be magnanimous when I hear about young people not needing the elderly. But when it happens to me, I don't like it and I feel selfish." As distance ensues, people feel that they are unloved and unlovable.

Implications of Romantic Love

Everybody wants to be special and significant. To want that is simply to be human. But are we ever really so important except in the delusion of our own or someone else's mind? As romantic love fades, so does that delusion. As the delusions fade in the face of reality and living experience with each other, people seek balance, *quid pro quo*, and

relationships become not only work but serious. Unfortunately, as people seek balance, there is an increase of reactivity, less freedom to be oneself, a loss of self and a loss of enthusiasm. Think of it as a seesaw seeking balance. One is not only aware of the person seated opposite him but is partly determined by that person. The search for balance may temporarily calm things down. As therapists, we initially try to balance the family, distributing responsibility, conversation and the significance of each one's feelings throughout the family. That is only the beginning and often does serve to calm the emotional climate. But it is temporary and sooner or later must be upset by the demands for individuality and differentiation. We set up a balance and then destroy it after the emotional climate has been calmed down. Critical mistakes in therapy or living are often made by working on individuality in the absence of a calm emotional climate or settling for a calm emotional climate, an adaptation, and not pursuing individuality for fear of destroying the calmness.

The delusion of romantic love may die rapidly, or over many years. It may seem to last a lifetime but die in a displaced fashion in another relationship. In other words, it can persist for a lifetime, but only at the expense of another relationship. The romantic love of a mother for a child may die almost immediately when she tries to hold the baby and he seems to pull away and not want to be touched. It may last for a lifetime so that "her son can do no wrong" but this delusion is only perpetuated at the expense of a distant relationship between herself and her husband and between husband and son. At the expense of a triangle. Post-partum depressions are a common form of the death of a romantic delusion. Romantic delusions in a marriage may stop after one day, deteriorate slowly or rapidly over years or be perpetuated at the expense of severe problems in a child. Romantic delusions about a father may be prolonged after his death as he continues to be or starts to be idealized. This can be at the expense of a husband or the relationship with mother. One can also sustain the hope for romance by getting rid of one person and blaming that person for the loss of romance. The hope of perpetual romance is sustained

by the hysterical search for excitement, affairs, substituting work for people or the begrudging acceptance of lack of hope seen in distant, "not feeling," depressed, half dead, unenthusiastic distancers. At the onset, therapists try to restore balance and set up structural rules and use various techniques to "solve problems." Certainly, the use of structure and techniques are important for function. If the focus remains there, therapy becomes an endless series of dealing with episodes, one after the other. It becomes a series of "tasks" that each one has to perform, a series of behaviors to do. The focus on pathology, responsibility and duty, power and control, misses the basic question, the inevitable death of romantic love and the ensuing death within the person, the feelings of nothingness and purposelessness.

As romantic love dies in direct or displaced form, desperate efforts are made to restore it. I may feel that I have to "fix" problems in the other, to raise the other up when they are down or maybe I will react and go down with them. In the desperate desire to maintain hope and avoid hopelessness and helplessness, romantic love can progress into efforts to control the object of that love. In the name of love, we have impact on others far beyond what we imagine, know or even mean to have. These desperate efforts to perpetuate the romance, based on a feeling of need and not want, are experienced inside of self as a death of fantasy, delusion and of our very own self as they inevitably progress toward failure. Soon the emotional climate in the family becomes increasingly reactive, out of control, determined by anyone. There is no stopper, no relief pitcher who can come in and put out the fire. The climate becomes such that no episode can be discussed without a marked increase in anxiety followed by argument or distance. One woman said, "I used to feel I had something. There is not much left. I am tired. I wanted to care about others, wanted to be taken care of and take care of others. This will never be."

Emptiness

The emotional state of emptiness is the transitional stage from romantic to sustaining love. If one runs from the empty emotions inside of self, this stage becomes the

transition to efforts to control others, to argument, anger, bitterness, resentment and sometimes violence. Running may take the form of filling the emptiness with activities, issues and causes, work or triangles, such as an affair. Love becomes a serious business as people run from their emptiness into hopes for fusion. But the romance is no longer possible because of distance, pursuit and triangles. People try to lower their expectations of what they "need" from others. But then they ask, "Why stay connected if I can't expect this from you?" It is as if expectations of getting something from others equals love. The real task is to lower one's expectations of others, stay connected as best one can and redefine love.

Life never lives up to what we expect of it. At this point, people say, "Let me alone. I have to be my own person." "But my father, he loved me differently than you do." "So I cry, I obsess, I complained, but my mother died and I was never her favorite and I can never make it up now." "I hate and love him at the same time."

The worse one feels about his own self, the higher the expectations he has of others and the more one tries and hopes to get his survival and self esteem from others. This leads to greater disappointments when this does not work. Behind every fusion or romance is a fear of loneliness and a lack of acceptance of self with the feeling that anything is better than nothing. As emptiness becomes more and more apparent in self, these feelings assume dominance.

The expectations that one has of loving and being loved and loveable are strongly influenced by the parent that one has been closer to. The very closeness to that parent also breeds disrespect for him/her since the overdose parent is often too sympathetic, bends the truth to protect that overcloseness and the advocacy makes what she says hard to believe. When the child grows up he is left with expectations that come from this parent, disrespect for that same parent and fears that he will turn out in life exactly like that parent. "I spent all my life trying to be different than my mother and here, at the age of forty, I end up screaming and behaving just like her."

As people grow and become aware of their emptiness, they often don't realize that it

is connected with the parent they were more distant from, usually the father. The emptiness is connected with this relationship, the one they feel they never had, the love that was never experienced. Often that distant relationship was accompanied with respect but without love. These periods of emptiness in the middle phase of the process of loving are profound, individual experiences that make one question the purpose and value of marriage, love, life, children and family. These experiences test all family relationships and tend to pull them apart. At these points in time, everyone considers divorce, separation or other emotional cutoffs as a distinct possibility. There is a reevaluation of minimal expectations from all relationships. The sense of feeling unloved naturally evolves into "no one could ever love me." Such a deep feeling of being unlovable is one of the most universal and hard to accept emotions. People tend to build a wall around it for protection. Despite the protection, they can read into anything and everything that "You don't love me." More and more everything centers around self in initial assumptions. There is a growing emotional selfishness. Such emotions scare people and there is a strong tendency to glue the relationship together. Caution invades the relationship. To be loved, one has to risk being unloved by taking "I" positions. Love does not mean the abdication of self. As the emptiness in self becomes more and more covered by protective walls of withdrawal, anger or substitution, there is a growing sense of doom inside the person. It feels like being at one's own funeral as relationships appear to die. Even fantasy takes on a gray coloration as it tries to survive and escape the emotion of being unlovable. People say, "What a fool I was to fall in love." "Why can't I love like others seem to do?" "If I fell in love again, I would be full." "Love me, don't waste it on others. I can make it worth your while." "If you leave me, you will regret it."

Emotional emptiness leaves one with the feeling, not truth, that there is nothing left outside of self. One looks inside and sees that there is something there but not much. Just a common ordinary meatball. None of us is much but we are something. Love makes others see me as being more than that in some strange way. Crazy, a delusion. The risk is that

the other people may lose this delusion, might not miss me, that my own self is the only card that I have to play and that might not be enough. "Can I survive the hurt, the pain and suffering. Oh, what he has done to me!" There is a dawning realization that death is a part of love. One must first learn to survive these empty feelings. It helps to put words on them such as sadness, worthlessness, purposelessness. Somehow, these specific words enable one to "get his fingers around himself." It helps to entertain these feelings of being unloved slowly, desensitizing self gradually to them. If people go into them too rapidly, they tend to lose the ability to connect with others and to drop into despair. Despair is no hope, not even in self. Once one can survive these empty feelings, then he can begin to learn from them.

One of the great "bad jokes" of life is that everybody carries around a book of wisdom inside his own self and then he rushes furiously and desperately away from that book much of his lifetime. Gradually one can begin to appreciate that emotion has nothing to do with the truth. It is pure functional pragmatism. Everyone has to go beyond the wall of hate, anger and bitterness. Then love might emerge. I view emptiness, in my mind, as a stake driven through self. It anchors self in place so that one does not bend to every breeze in life. The anchor allows one to stand for something, to be sensitive to others but not determined by them, by their reactions. Self is the definition of what one stands for and the struggle to live up to it. Differentiation is knowing where self ends and others begin and dealing respectfully with both. As one begins to learn from his insides, he realizes that he should not try to fill in the emptiness of others because that is impossible. He realizes that to preserve connectedness, he must (with the exception of small children) decrease his expectations of others to the minimum, that he will never get away from suffering and that it is OK to cry.

As one learns from his insides while staying connected, he learns that hunger for love kills off love. He learns that he can allow others to be empty, that he must stop trying to fix people and solve problems, that he can listen without feeling responsible for others. He learns that one is special if he sees himself

as a "meatball." This genuine humility distinguishes him. It must be genuine and based on living experience or it becomes a manipulation. It is not exactly true that life proceeds in sequence but if it did, it would be fair to say that one must accept self (not love self) before he can love others. We are loved partly because of and not despite our imperfections. Because love is inconstant, a sometimes quality, there must be a center of self, a self integrity, a life for self, a network that allows others to move off and that avoids the suffocation and possessiveness that drives others away. This center of self, based on emptiness, loneliness, helplessness and hopelessness allows one to go on with one's own life without resentment because others have left. These emotions lead to a redefinition of romantic love into sustaining love when these emotions can be claimed as my own, the human condition. These emotions cannot be taken to the family until they can be so claimed; otherwise they will be presented or heard as blame, the responsibility of others to fix them. Just as love is the fuel of connectedness, hope of completion is the fuel of fusion. Emptiness is the fuel of self.

Respect

As one begins to experience emptiness, knowing that he can survive it, realizing from that living experience that it is a universal human experience, he begins to realize that he must have self respect first. He finds himself talking about and using that word to himself and others. The struggle to define and live up to "What I believe in" becomes the task of many lifetimes. It becomes clear that respect is a vital ingredient of love. Like all words, respect can be looked at in many ways and defined from many different perspectives. It can be seen in terms of time and space. When one listens carefully to others instead of concentrating on his response, he is giving the other person the time and space and respect that their viewpoint deserves. If one is ready on time for an appointment, he is being respectful of his own and others' time. If he is always early, he does not respect his own time and over-respects the time of others. If he is always late, he is disrespectful of the time of others.

Another way to look at respect is in terms

of space. Respect does not mean to treat with deference or to look up to. That is more like admiration. It does mean to honor and esteem and show consideration and significance to self and others. There is an aura of politeness about it. I often picture it in my mind in terms of my clinical practice. When people first come to see me, they tend to look up to me. This is a useful tool since we start with very little leverage. As time goes on and I become less active, we start to look straight across at each other, not up or down, and this is more respectful, both to self and other.

Respect must be present before there can be any kind of sustaining love. Often people put this in reverse. They say, "I will respect you if, when and after I find that I like you. How can you respect someone you do not like?" This is putting the cart before the horse. Respect for the person, his time and space, is given automatically and, after that, it may be possible to like and then love him. Romantic love is riddled with elements of disrespect. It contains strong elements of an urge and a belief that one person can change the other, that differences will melt away so that a fused "We-ness" can occur.

Self respect comes before respecting others. This is not exactly true since, like most human phenomena, one proceeds hand in glove with the other. Respect is not a two-way street. If it were it would be conditional. I will respect you if you will respect me. It has to be automatically given in most situations. An exception is the "Gork Theory." We do not respect newborn children. We have expectations of them and tell them what to do. We assume that they are born zeroes, all potential and little or no actuality. The process of growing up is a respectful one in which we gradually turn over responsibilities to them. As we turn over this responsibility in a respectful way, experimenting with how they handle it, children become less gorks and more adults. The operating principle is that no effort is made to change others, with the exception of children.

All relationships start then with respect and advance from there to varying degrees of caring about. Acquaintances, friends, personal relationships and love. Love can't exist without respect for self and others. As one becomes more familiar with the emptiness

inside of self, these empty emotions hold the center of self and give equal respect to the center of self in others. It should not be forgotten that children do not give respect to adults. They have no concept of time and space. If they want something, they want it right away, they interrupt continually into the time and space of adults. Growing up involves teaching them respect for the time and space of others. It is surprising how many adults have never grown up in this respect. They still want what they want when they want it. Adults can only teach this respect to children by "running the show." They must establish authority initially. In love between parents and children, authority precedes respect and respect precedes love. Love without authority or respect results in an emotional overcloseness that results in lack of self definition and differentiation on the part of the child.

Disrespect may be subtle or gross. The operating principle of respect is to not tell anybody what to do. This is a process principle in that you can't do much directly about the desire to tell others what to do but you can prevent yourself from acting on it by refusing to make it known. This prevents you from actively trying to change people. Acceptance of others is not only tolerance but genuine interest is expressed in the inner feelings and thoughts, the space and time of these people. This has nothing in common with the theory of "get it off your chest." But demands or control can be subtle, in the tone, the facial expression or thinly concealed threats of retribution. Silence and withdrawal can be an attempt at self control or a sign of rudeness. Disrespect tends to be contagious, to spread through the system. It comes from high expectations of others coupled with the sense that "I can do it better."

Another common form of disrespect and fusion is mind reading, one person acting like he knows the other's motives, purposes, intents better than they themselves do. This usually ascribes negative motives to the other person. Hurt leads to anger and then to disrespect. This protects self from the experience of hurt and puts the focus on others. One can also use the sexual relationship to show disrespect. In terms of function, the personal relationship precedes

the sexual one. Sex is so attractive that by itself it can mask for some time the absence of a personal relationship. How many women have said, "He cares about me only for sex. He uses me. He never talks to, shows interest in or listens to me. After an argument, he wants sexual relations."

Disrespect can be so atrocious that it can verge into evil. Evil goes beyond human difficulties and is not excused by any explanation. The more one tries to explain it the more it moves from an issue of good and bad into a "psychological problem." To beat a child to death certainly goes well beyond a problem and into the murky arena of good and evil. Disrespect can enter into that arena too when it becomes malignant. The opposite confusion can also occur. Some people place all issues into the good-evil box and do not allow for human difficulties. When disrespect becomes terribly invasive of the others' space so that the invasion is intense and nearly total, it can become an issue of good and evil. Good and evil do exist and everything cannot be explained in terms of emotions, thinking, feeling and function.

Sustaining Love

Sustaining love is an emotion and not a feeling. The distinction is that an emotion is how I feel about me. It basically excludes the other person as if he or she did not exist. How I would feel about me if you never existed. This is where the gold of differentiation lies. It gives me a sense of being me.

A lady told me the other day that she was flying home from Florida and began to think about the plane possibly crashing. She suddenly realized for the first time that "It was ME that would be dying. ME!" This was the beginning of her discovery that she actually existed as a person. In contrast, feelings such, as anger, impatience, fear, are generally reactive to other people by definition. They take self outside of self and tend toward fusion. In contrast to romantic love, sustaining love is actual, based on living experience with a person that one bumps into every day. The fantasy is gone and the uniqueness and eccentricities of each person emerge. There is little romance in washing diapers, hearing a spouse belch or caring for a

senile grandparent. These are very demanding tasks that require effort from self and satisfaction from self. They do have non-fused systematic effects but these effects are secondary and not sought directly. The joy of this kind of love must somehow come from the giving. If there are elements of fusion or "oneness" then there is no "I."

A mother who cares for a child because "he is part of me" is fused to that child and will have trouble allowing him to separate during the growth process. Sustaining love is not self-centered or other-focused. It contains a keen appreciation of the value to self in giving, in its function, productivity and satisfaction. Sustaining love does not mean giving up self, becoming a martyr or a non-person for the sake of the other. It does not mean setting out to please the other person, or not to please them for that matter. It comes from a genuine acceptance and respect for oneself, "the way I am." It is not self-love or selfishness or grandiosity. "I buy my own package with my warts and limitations." It is humble. It leads to a redefinition of what is actually good for self, a genuine lack of self-interest when dealing with the time, space and movement of others, an appreciation that all other people are different and that improvement in others brings more self to the family and network. Everybody ultimately profits.

All of these qualities demand an underlying assumption and sense of determination to carry it out. The assumption is that movement says more about the person than his words. There must be an acceptance of movement representing the end vector of all the forces within a person. One must be able to avoid entanglement with episodes, with details and concrete words. One must not get caught in details and small stuff. If a child who has been withdrawn begins to become arrogant and angry, he is at least moving out of himself and toward others despite the fact that he is not doing it well or functionally.

Another assumption is that the direction of movement precedes in importance the nature of the movement. It is simply not human to expect that anyone will make new moves in a functional manner. I often compare it to a child learning to speak. At the

outset, he ruins the king's English. Parents do not correct him at first since they are glad that he is learning to speak. When he becomes more proficient at talking, then they begin to correct him. All new directions of movement are awkward and dysfunctional at first.

It is predictable that a distant husband will emerge angry and impatient when he first starts moving toward his spouse. None of these moves will be encouraged unless one is determined to place the direction of the move before the nature of the movement. This places a keen focus on the development of a positive emotional climate, one that will encourage movement. Much of therapy approaches problems when the emotional climate in the family is full of anxiety, hypersensitive and self-righteous. In that context no problem can be solved. One must work toward creating a climate of love. Then many problems simply dissolve. The development of this calm, reasonable, respectful emotional climate is the top priority for love to emerge. The development of this positive emotional climate is more important than problem solving, more important than most episodes (except those principles one would die for). It leads to the development of an attitude and philosophy that most things don't matter but connectedness is something that does.

Sustaining love is a quality that can't be earned from others. At the same time that it cannot be created, it is still partly the product of hard work. It is learned, suffered through and worked at in order to prosper. The desire for it is natural but it is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. It is amazing how many people feel, "I have married and now that is accomplished. Now I must work at my career." Learning to love should be a growth experience, perhaps the most important in life.

Sustaining love has its birth in the death of fused romantic love, in the inner death that one experiences as he moves into emptiness, a profound, inner, individual experience of loneliness, hopelessness and helplessness. The urge to run, to triangle, to distance and maintain hope outside of oneself fights with the urge to stay in the family, to endure, to sustain. If one can stay with his emptiness, learn to gradually survive it and finally to learn

and experience wisdom from his insides, then he is ready for sustaining love. Such love is impossible without the experience of emptiness. Many relationships break off during this period. As one begins to emerge from the swamp and confusion of honestly facing himself, love emerges more as a process, becoming systematic and involving other people. Yet it is a different process than romantic love. There is a strong sense and conviction that it comes from me. It is no longer perceived as a two-way street. There is a growing sense that I can and do influence the emotional climate of love and that that is all that I can do. There is a growing satisfaction in the acceptance of my limitations, my inability to change others and in simply doing my part, the best I can. There is a willingness to acknowledge and accept the fact that a deep investment of my tenderness and emotional vulnerabilities in other people in the system is a risky business. Important investments in life are always risky. If there were a guarantee, an investment would lose its significance.

Love gradually becomes an expression of love to others, a trusting of myself to others, an acceptance of risk and the hurt that will inevitably ensue since human beings do not always function at their best. The moments of functional love are more important than the inevitable hurt that arises since closeness and hurt are handmaidens. So love benefits the one who loves and bitterness kills the soul of the one who is bitter. Love becomes the fuel of connectedness and one searches for a descriptive definition of the elements of sustaining love. One key aspect of this search is the struggle to see others as separate, distinct people, not a wife, a spouse, a husband, a mother, a father, a son or daughter. The struggle is to see them as people who happen, among other things, to be a mother, etc. It is amazing how the human tendency to fuse tends to put labels on people and obscure the distinctiveness of their individual personality, how we tend to take so personally the actions of others that really only represent their individuality and unique backgrounds, the continuing influence of their extended families. The closer we are to people, the more obscure their distinct individuality becomes. People are often

discouraged because they can see this uniqueness at a distance but lose it the closer they move toward each other. They find it difficult to appreciate that the struggle with fusion increases the closer two people approach each other, that problems will recur when less distance is presented in the relationship.

Sustaining love does not evaluate what it gives in terms of what it gets in return. It does mean that one has to compromise since love in a system is a systematic process, freely given without demand. Love clearly excludes violence no matter what the explanation. That is never justified. It always looks for agreement when possible but allows, expects and encourages disagreement. It is not defensive or reactively argumentative but can differ on principle, not tolerance. Such acceptance of difference is not to be confused with indifference, tolerance or trying to please the other person. It teaches a person that one will have a different understanding of parents after he, himself, becomes a parent. It teaches that a child sees a father differently than a wife sees that same man as a husband, that children can never really understand their parents until they grow up themselves.

To love as an act involves giving to others. It is individual. As a process between two or more people, it involves more than one person and, therefore, demands both giving and receiving. The giving and receiving must be in everybody. Yet the process remains individual to the extent that it must go on without expectation of return. To that extent even the process has individual elements in it. Because of no expectations, love becomes inexhaustible. There is room for all and no one comes "first." The family does not ask the question, "Who comes first, the children or the parents, your mother or me?"

Sustaining love does not act as if there is a limited economy of caring about in which I must get there and get there first, and get mine before the well runs dry. There is enough for everybody. The quantity of love is unlimited but the time to give that love is limited. On the one hand, sustaining love does not look at the clock. It manages to give total interest to the other person when one is with them. "When he talks to me, listens to me or is simply with me, he makes me feel that I am

the only person in his world at that time. I know that is not true, but I feel that way." On the other hand, love is limited by time. One cannot be in two places at the same time. One cannot be listening with that intensity to a group of people. When one is working in his office, his mind cannot be on his family. Sustaining love is unlimited in quantity but is limited by time.

The other human limiting time factor in sustaining love is the fact that people do not change or love in synchrony. People do not function on a steady level. They have their ups and downs depending on the level of stress both internal and external in their life. One may be up to loving or want more love from the other at any given time. This is one of the difficulties with the process of changing. People do not change synchronously. One moves up the scale of changing and loving as the other moves down and then back up. This is why the process of loving and being loved contains strong individual elements, almost as if, "I am going to love you no matter what." There is the strong impression that the other will return from being distracted, will return to me eventually. This is based on the living experience of a positive emotional bank account.

It has happened in the past and it will again. "He never left me." When romantic love has been stressed, strained and fractured over the years, there tends to be a negative emotional bank account. There is no sense of confidence in the relationship. Each negative episode is fitted into a context of relationships going downhill. There is an atmosphere of impending doom, pervasive pessimism, that evil in the relationship outweighs any possible good. In emotional systems, as in economic ones, the rich tend to get richer and the poor tend to get poorer. It is important for the therapist to make it absolutely clear to the people and families he deals with that sustaining love acknowledges the infinite quantity of love but also recognizes the human time limitations of it. It acknowledges the human fact that people function on an irregular level and sometimes are distracted by their own personal difficulties, by others, by stress. Sustaining love allows people to be out of sync, to be inconstant and inconsistent, to realize that a husband at work is more

involved with work than his children at that particular moment. And that it is OK to be that way. The moments in between sustaining love are filled with an acceptance of the suffering and emptiness within self.

Sustaining love then is never complete and partly conditional. One struggles to make the conditional part based on principles, substantial, minimal principle. It is not based on how neat a housekeeper one's spouse is. It is not based on how well a child does in school. It is not based on how much money a husband makes. It is not based on the grandparent's will. Substantial principle is always based on respect, not trying to directly or indirectly, by manipulation or clever paradox, change the other person. Substantial principle avoids the layers of barbed wire that people place in the way of love to fulfill fantasy, myth, expectations of others and to avoid emotional death. It realizes that love is not enough, that respect precedes both liking and love, that one must face the unanswerable question of commitment. If one commits forever, will he be taken for granted? If one does not commit at all, can any relationship survive? Commitment is clearly necessary but how much, how long, under what circumstances, with what risk and with how much of my tender, vulnerable feelings and emotions?

The word "need" is used in many ways. It can mean a condition or situation in which something or someone is necessary or required. It can be used interchangeably with "want." Want indicates something or someone who is greatly or somewhat desired. Sustaining love is not a need, a necessity in the strict sense of the word. Because it is not fused, not "romantic," one can live with the other. It gives rise to the operating definition. "Always remember, you are very important to me, but given sufficient reason, I could throw you back in the pond tomorrow and find another fish." If we feel we need anyone person, then we are trapped by that need and trap others in the net of need. No one can die without replacement, children cannot grow up, marriages become suffocating.

Wanting someone allows for that person to be an individual, encourages growth of self, individuation and differentiation. If sustaining love is seen as a want, then two people select

to be with each other no matter what they say. Because they so select, then they emotionally deserve each other despite what they do and say to each other. If they deserve each other, if they fit hand in glove emotionally, *e.g.*, the distancer and the pursuer, then each one can only blame himself for staying in the relationship. If they "need" each other, then one has the right to demand of the other in order to survive.

Finally there are spiritual aspects of sustaining love. If one sees the desire for romantic completion as a universal striving, the realization that this can only be fulfilled by someone that is suprahuman, that romantic fulfillment is a delusion-this realization takes human beings off pedestals, lowers expectations, makes relationships more realistic and more possibly functional. We stop attempting and expecting the impossible.

Implications of Sustaining Love

Since people operate at different levels of function, the omnipresent, deeper levels of sustaining love are always present but not always obvious. Such love is by its nature unbalanced. At any given time it may be more apparent in one than the other and its presence must be evaluated over long periods of time, not at anyone moment or during anyone episode. The love of a mother for a child may not be returned for many years. It often takes time for sustaining love to move from an individual event to process. People prosper when they grow up in a context of love, whether it be from one individual or as a process. They grow up in love and mature in years. It takes a long time to develop a personal relationship, to move from romantic love to sustaining love. This is because sustaining love requires spending time with the other person, patience, listening, talking, interest in the other and being interesting. Not many people get this far and nobody gets there as a steady state. A song entitled "I can get along without you very well" would not sell many copies.

Sustaining love is an emotional function that works because it is good and is good because it works. One cannot separate the good from the functional or the functional from the good. As an emotion, how I feel about me, love takes on greater significance

than feelings that are primarily reactive to others. Anger, hatred, liking, comfort, etc. Feelings are seen as human and of significance because they are a part of a person but not intrinsically important. To a large extent, one loves the other despite the feelings in self and other. When feelings and emotions go hand in hand, this is lovely. When feelings and emotions divide self into opposite camps, this becomes a test of sustaining love. Is one still loveable despite certain feelings? Sustaining love encourages and takes delight in the growth and individuation of others. One is loved for what he is, assets and liabilities, not only for what he does or should do. It is expansive and can encompass numbers of people. Husband and wife can expand the family and have children. A woman can love her father and her husband. A mother can love a child and a spouse. In sustaining love people do not behave as if there is a limited economy of love, either you love me or your mother or "I must come first."

As one goes through the profound inner experience of emptiness, as he manages to stay connected with his family and spouse through that experience, there is a gradually emerging readjustment in the hierarchy of his values, what he believes in. There is not much of a change in these values but a shake-up in their relative degree of importance. Number one becomes number fifteen. This may not seem like much of a change but it is terribly important. The values that one looks for in others change more directly. These values that one appreciates in others change dramatically in nature and kind. It becomes clear that there is a striking difference between "being in love" and "loving." "Being in love" is romantic fusion doomed to death. Love begins to see that the other person is an individual, not a son, a wife, a father. As such, one loves the other person whether the love is reciprocated or not, whether it becomes a process or not. As one emerges from emptiness, he realizes that he misses the other person. This must be present, one can't force it. It is either there or not there. It cannot be analyzed. This is the part of romantic love that persists. The other takes on a greater significance than he or she reasonably has. That portion of "being in love" persists. Such a description of sustaining love is an ideal.

One never gets there but sometimes is enough. As an inconstant, inconsistent state, it provides the fuel of connectedness over time.

Sustaining love comes from suffering, living experience, hard work and determination. Descriptive definitions are provided so that people can have a goal to work toward, so that they realize that it is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. It involves a willingness to share self with others and even others with others. For example, a wife must be willing to share a spouse with his network of friends and his extended family. Sharing of self means the willingness to take the risk that "If I tell you about me, you will still love me." It is the realization that the desire for tenderness, physical touch and caring about is not a weakness. It does not mean shooting from the hip, being "smart assed" or saying anything at any time under the guise of "I am just telling you my feelings." This can be cruelty. Sustaining love requires the realization that love is more important than issues and episodes, that one can reset the emotional thermostat from issues to love at will. That warm friendly emotional climate is the only environment in which issues can be raised. That one can move from feelings aroused by issues to the emotionality of love. To accomplish this, one must translate what the other says, using a positive frame of reference. One must avoid getting stuck in the literal, concrete words. In a warm emotional climate, there are no stuck issues, for example, craziness in one member of the family, memories of irreparable hurts in the past, work issues, affairs or fixed triangles.

One common way of becoming stuck in an episodic swamp is to argue over money. A love relationship can rapidly turn into a business relationship with arguments over money. Therapists can increase tension in the family by getting into elaborate discussions and rule-making about the disposal of family money when the problem is that the people in the family are not talking about love. The relationship has become more of a business one. With second marriages becoming more common, attorneys and others foster this problem by talking about premarital economic agreements. These only foster the disintegration of who gets what, turning love into business.

Sustaining love is not proud or, better put, is proud of certain things and not others. Certainly not of image or "face." One must be willing to join the common lot of mankind with all the weaknesses involved in that common lot. One of the great tests in this humility is to select someone whom you feel has done you in and apologize. When asked, "What can I do about such a relationship?" I often reply, "Apologize to that person." Then I hear the blame and excusing of self. "For what!"

Pride and privacy, the great Irish sins, must be kept to a minimum. Privacy eliminates options because others might find out, and keeps self from emerging because of what others might think, feel and what their reaction might be. Pride keeps people from expressing their most tender, vulnerable emotions or encourages a pseudo-tenderness. It can emerge as a gushy, overused "I love you." It can be as restrained and limited as "You know I do (love you), look what I do for you." The response to that is usually, "I could hire someone to do that." Pride and saving face tend to make change conditional. "I will if you." No one initiates the change and one waits for the other. Paralysis ensues. Sustaining love does not get started as an individual actor as a process.

In sustaining love it is acceptable to differ. "You are not perfect but I buy the package." One is not forgiving, which implies that "You did me in," but truly accepting. It is positive, optimistic and not critical. There is a minimum of win-lose and right-wrong. It allows others to have their emptiness without feeling responsible for it or responsible for fixing or filling it up. There is a minimum of attack and defense or counterattack, and good humor, especially the ability to laugh at one's own self, is a very important factor. Love is not a conflict or a confrontation but peace, weakness and strength. It is not exciting but quiet and gentle with a balanced rhythm. Sustaining love is sensitive but not so sensitive that every move or word takes on exaggerated importance and people begin to tiptoe around each other. It is not so serious. These minimums of sensitivities do not mean that everybody shoots from the hip. That is inhuman. People require more careful treatment than that. The decrease is

hypersensitive areas and issues allows movement to flow to and from all members of the family, nuclear and extended. There are not cutoffs and movement is not focused on anyone person. The minimum of hypersensitivities indicate that most things don't matter but those few that do, like love and connectedness, matter a lot.

There are many ways of showing sustaining love. As long as it is effective, it is reasonable and v.v. Love puts effectiveness first and then looks backward and says that it must be good and reasonable because it was effective. To be effective, it must be known by the other person. One person said, "I always knew my dad loved me. He never said it but he was thoughtful and kind." Another said, "I never was sure my dad loved me. He never said it." Sustaining love can be shown through physical contact. It places tenderness before sex and the personal relationship before the physical. Tenderness and the pragmatic, practical, "responsible" approach are often opposed. A hyperfocus on responsibilities can leave tenderness out in the cold. A focus on performance can leave tenderness out. Tenderness won't make one feel helpless. Tenderness is personal and accentuates the positive.

Problem discussions, when they dominate the scene (especially in therapy), can be a way of avoiding love and tenderness by focusing on the negative and the pessimistic. The glass is half empty, not half full. One can have a problem either way, being too optimistic or too pessimistic. Love indicates that, if we must err, it is better to err on the side of being too optimistic. Tenderness cannot be used as a manipulation to get one's way or as a trap so that others will give in. The phony aspects, such as in sexual activity after arguments or arguments after sexual activity, will show eventually. Tenderness helps one to get close and yet be "myself." From this description, one can see that sustaining love is a most unusual thing.

Tenderness

Tenderness is a key part of sustaining love. It is a quality of delicacy, vulnerability, sensitivity, gentleness and consideration. It is a feeling of comfort with being with someone. It is like feeling at home in your own house.

There is a sense of fitting in unconditionally. Some experience this feeling more at work than at home, and that is a sign that something is missing in the family. Like an old shoe, it is based upon a positive emotional bank account, a common history, common ground, memories and acceptances. It is not exciting but calmer and more balanced without the highs and lows of the hysterical search for romantic love. One buys the package of the other. Five per cent of the other is better than a replacement. It is not serious but lightly intense. It is kind, gentle and soft. There is a pleasant sadness about it. It is a quality that has duration and memories, even after death. "I love you despite myself, at times." It proceeds despite negative feedback, at times.

Tenderness is optimistic about human nature and carries this undercurrent of optimism and confidence, even in moments of anger. It realizes that sustaining love is a process that two must contribute to, but the contributions are equal only over long periods of time. There is no *quid pro quo*. It is patient, quiet, dishonest and willing. It is willing to bend the truth for the sake of the emotional climate. It does not let pride get in the way and is not serious but humorous. It is reliable, friendly and not heavy. It shows interest in the other and listens. It is an emotional climate. Within this climate of tenderness, one can share self with other.

Because tenderness is such a valuable emotional climate, it always involves a risk. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. It is always awkward, embarrassing and difficult to say, "I love you." But that is why it is so beautiful and meaningful. It is not said out of necessity. When it becomes easy to say it, it becomes meaningless. The universal desire for such a climate makes it hard to give. It is so risky. It is better if it is said, but not necessary to say it to convey it to others. It prospers when people understand that it is human and universal to feel unloved, unlovable, foolish and embarrassed.

Summary

Hope is the fuel of fusion and emptiness the fuel of self. So love is the fuel of connectedness. Romantic love is largely based on fusion and disrespect. Romantic love says

one plus one equals one. Emptiness starts out believing that one plus one equals zero. In attempting to run from it, to maintain hope, to triangle, one plus one begins to equal three or four or five.

As one comes to grips with his feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and the inner death of his hopes, one plus one begins to equal two. Many people put the cart before the horse. They place liking and loving before respect. "I will respect him after I like him first." Respect, defined as not trying directly or indirectly to change anyone, made operational by refusing to tell others what to do, respect in this sense is the bedrock of human connectedness. One can move from respect to varying intensities of friendship, caring about, love or indifference. Without

respect, closeness becomes impossible. When one gets into the empty feelings inside self, there is a reevaluation of what one believes in and stands for. Many people, without going through this re-evaluation decide, on the basis of their present values, to cut off from others when their expectations are not met. How do they know how they will feel about others when the living experience of getting in touch with their own insides will change their expectations radically? They don't, but hope that there is something, someone out there who will provide the missing piece, keeps them running from their own self. Romantic love starts as fused process full of excitement. Since fusion leads to distance or loss of oneself, it is doomed to failure.