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# LOVE TO LIVE

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**Love make life full and helps against feelings of anxiety and fear. It means connecting with others in a meaningful way. But loves also goes beyond it. It helps to get in contact with the foundation that connects all of us. It reduces distances between people and builds connections with the deepest and profoundest aspects of our humanity.**

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## Introduction

Love is the act of seeing behind the veil of veils of personality and social roles, to see what connects. Practicing love can be a great benefit to mental and physical health. Unfortunately, much focus is on things that are associated with love, but may be easier to accomplish. When we love we connect with another human being. It enriches our world and makes it larger than we could ever imagine. When spiritual texts say love everyone, then this is not just an ethical advice, it is about mental and physical well-being and survival. To love others reduces boundaries and focuses on what is the common ground we all share under our feet and within us.

Particularly in times of crisis, practicing love has become even more important. This can be quite practical in application and outcome. Take the COVID-19 pandemic, for example. As a consequence of social distancing rules, the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia experienced a shift from primarily a face-to-face delivery to online delivery of academic lessons, as so many other institutions worldwide. Researchers at the university, who were teaching social work, explored how COVID-19 had forced them to alter their teaching practice, cope with uncertainties, and respond with loving kindness to the shifting needs of students. They focused on an ethic of love, a values-based relationship-oriented practice promoting care, collaborative dialogue and solidarity between people, using self-compassion and reflexivity. (Gates et al., 2021) It does not take much to imagine that by doing so they made it through the pandemic much better, also on an interpersonal level, than many others. We often tend to forget that love is as much about acting as it is about thoughts and feelings, as much about an attitude as about a state of being.

## Love and Health

The positive health effects of love have been described widely. Engaging in joyful activities such as love may activate areas in the brain responsible for emotion, attention, motivation and memory (i.e., limbic structures), and it may further serve to control the autonomic nervous system, i.e., stress

reduction. This specific activity pattern in the central nervous system appears to exert protective effects, even on the brain itself. Moreover, anxiolytic effects of pleasurable experiences may occur by promotion of an inhibitory tone in specific areas of the brain. (Esch et al., 2005) It is risky to categorise love as an attitude and a practice, because it should fundamentally be the same. The distinction between love for a person and love for God, for example disappears, when you see God in the other person and the other person in God. It is not surprising that a significant health effect of a loving relationship with God has been demonstrated. (Levin, 2001) Connectedness works on all levels if the communication is meaningful, because meaningfulness of an exchange is what can bring about change, whether it is a positive feeling or a new insight or thought.

Since our mental and physical health are deeply intertwined, furthering one also furthers the other, and love has a positive effect on both levels. The connectedness that love brings lets us experience the world at a depth that is greater than we otherwise could. Love has been described as arising from a desire to expand the self by including that other in the self, as well as by associating expansion with that particular other. (ARON & ARON, 1996) Love is thus directed at the outside world, but coming from the inside world. It enlarges one's communication space, the space in which meaningful messages are exchanged (Haverkamp, 2018), thus ultimately embracing the entire world. This enlargement of one's space increases the sense of security and safety one can feel in the world, because one has it made one's own through the act of loving. Without love, the world is a small place, and to many it is indeed a desert. Often, what stands in the path of love is fear, which is usually rooted in a misunderstanding of love. Love does not mean anything is lost, but it adds to it. This misconception frequently comes from a confusion of the sense of self that is connective and the ego, which carries out our actions as an individual. If one sees the ego as oneself, love and connecting with others can seem like a threat. When this happens, anxiety, fears, depression, and other afflictions can ensue.

Love is the force of connectedness. Whether it is nature or other people one connects with, the central part is connecting with life. It has been shown empirically that there are significant associations among measures of nature connectedness and indices of well-being and mindfulness, for example. (Howell et al., 2011) So connectedness overall can increase our sense of well-being. But it can also make us more successful, as we feel safer, more secure, and more confident. And it is important to keep in mind that love does not depend on whether we feel we are loved by others. When we love, the world automatically loves us back.

## Love and Life

Life is connectedness with ourselves and others, and since love underlies most meaningful communication, we have a fuller life when we love. No, let me rephrase that. In order to live, we need to love, and when we love, we live. Both can break the boundaries of time. Eternal love goes with eternal life because they are made of the same basic stuff, interconnectedness and communication, which has determined the universe since its inception. Life with love leads to a full experience of life, and love makes life real.

It has been suggested that “love” is the broad, everyday term for emotions related to the three interrelated behavioral systems attachment, caregiving, and sex. (SHAYER et al., 1996) However, that does not address directly that love is a communication style in its own right, and at this a unique one, because it maintains itself. Love as communication pulls the communication dynamics to deeper and deeper levels, meaning the information that is being communicated is getting increasingly meaningful. Often it may encounter resistance, as in the case of fear, but if one gives the pull of communication time, it will overcome it like waves ultimately overcome the hardest rock.

## Universal Love

Many say that love comes in different categories, but if you are talking about ‘love’ I would argue that there is only one, and that transcends all unique situations. If you truly experience romantic love it is divine and earthly at the same time, because you are seeing the universal and timeless within the other person. If you cannot see it, it may be more honest to pay someone for intimacy. At least both know what they are doing. So, if you use the word ‘love’, keep in mind that it really is all or nothing. This, however, can also be liberating, because if there is no halfway house between different shades of love, when you feel you are truly loving, you are all in. You are on the road, the only one that really counts.

At the same time, love needs to be an end in itself. Loving combat, for example, does not spread universal love, and it may also point to individual issues. Interestingly, a 1952 study with US and British air force pilots found that “analysis of the dynamics that underly success or failure of flying in combat leads the author to believe that less concern need be shown for the civilian adjustment of those men who ‘broke’ in war than for the adjustment of those who enjoyed the war too much.” (Bond, 1952)

## Using the Brain

Rational thinking is sometimes seen as an adversary of love. However, when we love, the brain should be a part of it just like anything else. Thinking can even help us to love better. Love really requires we are all in, which also includes our thoughts and everything else. The brain can be powerful help in experiencing and finding one's love. We live in an interconnected world, and to steer through it is how our brain can help us to better live love in different situations and with different people. It helps us communicate better, and communication is how love can be lived. This can be communication on the outside or on the inside. Connectedness with ourselves and others is the key to living and communicating love, and the brain can help us do that. The brain can be an amazing tool in living love.

Switching on the brain can make love even more fulfilling, after all our thoughts and feelings influence each other. They all are information, and love is the communication of meaningful information. So, with a loving attitude you will experience your thoughts and feelings differently because love is also a way of doing things, which has a practical effect on how the brain works with and uses information.

In the case of romantic love, for example, functional magnetic resonance imaging studies, which visualize the functioning of different systems and areas of the brain, have found activation increases in brain regions involved in the processing of reward, motivation and emotion regulation, when romantic lovers view photographs of their partners. In a study by Song and colleagues, regional homogeneity of the left dorsal anterior cingulate cortex was significantly increased in the "in-love" group, which was positively correlated with length of time in love and negatively correlated with the lovelorn duration since breakup in the "ended love group" group. Within the reward, motivation, and emotion regulation network (dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, insula, caudate, amygdala, and nucleus accumbens) and in the social cognition network (temporo-parietal junction, posterior cingulate cortex, medial prefrontal cortex, inferior parietal, precuneus, and temporal lobe), functional connectivity was significantly increased in the "in-love" group. In most regions within the two networks, functional connectivity was positively correlated with the duration of love in the "in-love" group but negatively correlated with the lovelorn duration of time since breakup in the "ended love group". (Song et al., 2015) Even if the love they tested was a romantic manifestation with an experience of dependence, still the concept of love as used in this article shone through as many of the centres activated are related to internal and external communication, which signals a drive towards higher connectivity, which is at the foundation of love. Any feelings of one-sided dependency, which may be part of the manifestation of romantic love, are probably just an instrument of how love increases connectivity.

## Overcoming Fears

If you look at it closely, you will see that fears hold us back from love. A dependence on the responses of others, including one's own child in the case of parenting, to maintain a sense of one's own identity, (Knox, 2007) can make love seem fearful. Fears can also be about the illusion of finality and other things. But the greatest fear may be that this love is not 'real'. The fear that we are seeking something within ourselves that is not there. However, at the same time it does not let us go because we know it is there. We are trying to protect ourselves from the disappointment not to find what connects us with ourselves and the universe in the profoundest and deepest ways. But love is more real than whatever we see in the outside world. If someone turns away from you, it is their person that does so. Their self cannot turn away from another self, or a soul from a soul, because they are inherently part of the same substrate, the same wide ocean. And do you know, what issues that person has, that they turn away from you? Do you know all there is to know?

The Christian bible says "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." (1 John 4:18) Biologically, peptides in the brain modulate the information that leads to love and fear in the brain (Dębiec, 2005). Oxytocin is associated with love and cuddling, while vasopressin is associated with fear responses. Both can affect various functions and areas in the brain, such as the amygdala, which dials the dial either more towards love or more towards fear.

Many fears may also be socially programmed. Unfortunately, society often uses fear as an instrument in making people conform with social processes and rules rather than appealing to more positive emotions, which could also enhance the feelings of self-confidence and self-worth, which could make working with deterrents unnecessary. Machiavelli argued that political stability and effective governance are more readily achieved if the people fear, rather than love, their political leaders. (Wilson, 2020) However, even back in the age when Machiavelli wrote these lines, I would argue that a political leader people can identify with and whom they love will have a much more stable foundation and more freedom in governing. Gandhi became Mahatma Gandhi because people loved him. He could ask them to do things in completely new ways, and many would have walked with him to the ends of the world. That is true power, which goes beyond the fleeting illusion of coercive external power Machiavelli was alluding to. Real power resonates on the inside, and lifts up everyone. It is the power that does not have to exert itself, because it is already present and shining in all of us. Anyone who connects up these individual lights by reflecting to everyone their own power, has

tremendous power. But to do so requires all a virtually infinite amount of love, which we are all capable of if we can overcome the limitations of 'I' by resting it safely in the 'we'.

## Perfection

One may ask how we can live love in an imperfect world. But imperfection is only an illusion because we perceive a deficit, which arises from disconnectedness and the seemingly unknown. Real love is perfection in itself. You may turn up and down the intensity with which you experience it, but that does not change the nature of love. A loving world is perfect in itself. Love is what connects us to everything because it sustains meaningful communication, which is the essence of life. From the smallest cell to the merger of the largest stars, the communication of information is what the universe is built on, and love is what connects us into it and with each other as humans. Also, it is part of our humanity nature has given us that we can feel and identify true love. In romantic love, for example, if I can see the universe through the eyes of the other beyond and behind personality and make-up, then we are talking about true love. If I love people so much that it makes me happy, then that is true love. If I no longer doubt it because the alternative seems dark and empty, it is love. If it feels like true love, it just is.

## How to Know When You are in Love

When you love someone, it feels you need them. Since love aims to increase communication (Haverkamp, 2017), you want to be closer to them. Since connectedness maintains life and lets it flourish, that is a good thing. However, 'wanting' is not really a part of love, but an element of the desire to experience love. If the objective is not greater unity and connectedness but the fulfilment of a need I might think I have, the desire can lead to unfulfilled craving and relative unhappiness because it is an illusion from its conception. Seeing reality is an act of love.

What can get in the way is our fears, our sense of helplessness, and the dread of loneliness. Among couples, fears, if they are not addressed, can lead to distorted communication, anger and more hurt. "You don't understand me." "I am doing all I can", etc. Love would mean seeing the common fears and apprehension, for example, by talking about them and exploring each other's needs, values and aspirations. Communication nourishes love, and love nourishes and maintains communication.

Since our ego is afraid of touching on the universal, which has existed before it and will continue to exist after it, it feels small and afraid. In some way, when your ego is most afraid, you may be at your



closest to love. It then helps to remind ourselves that the ego can be a useful instrument in our interactions with the world, but that it is really our creation, serving something far greater than it, such as a loving relationship. The self can look straight into infinity, while the ego looks at its watch and is aware of its limitations in time and space. The self can through its ability to connect with other selves experience states of unity. In the Karaniya Metta Sutta the Buddha's words are recited as "Cultivate an all-embracing mind of love, for all throughout the universe, in all its height, depth and breadth – Love that is untroubled, And beyond hatred or enmity". (Buddharakkhita, 2020)

## Love to Live

It is not easy to love in a way that goes beyond some current urge or desire we may have. But when we see in another something that goes beyond a means to an end, we touch what we have in common. Loving can not only enrich life but give life. A practice of love extends life in purely earthly time.

Love is something that can be lived in many ways every day. It is not only the feeling one person has for another, but it goes far beyond it. It is an approach to life. When we practice love it changes our interactions and network in the world, which has an effect on how we experience it. Love of life in a more limited personal sense has been supported by empirical studies. For example, in one study results supported the development and practice of love of life-focused therapy for the treatment of psychiatric outpatients, with a concentration on two issues: creating enjoyable positive emotions and changing the patient's focus toward a positive outlook on life. (Dadfar et al., 2021) However, I am suggesting a definition of loving life that goes beyond the love of one's own life or a life of life towards a connection with all and everything, where the loving is really an expression of existence within a connected universe.

## Enriching Life

By embracing the world and experiencing love towards others, we make it so much richer. Love is a two-way street, but it can be experienced by one person. What happens is that if one person experiences it, it then spreads and widens its horizon. It is infectious, and can make the world around us more loving. Even another person gets defensive and even more angry, it is important to keep in mind that you may have helped the person realise that they have issues they need to get resolved. If they are too afraid, they may not go there, but important is to see things for how they are.

Love is never unreprociated. You may think that it is not so helpful to love when love does not seem to be reciprocated. However, love also helps the one doing the loving, as well making change possible in the one who is being loved. No only on a biological level, love makes us feel better psychologically. When you make love towards the world your mantra the whole world changes. It becomes a much more hospitable place.

You may think that with the stress of veryday life, it may not be so easy to practice that. However, that loving feeling canactually help reduce stress. Good feelings make you feel better in many ways. It opens your heart to the world and helps you communicate in better ways.

You amy also think that in today's 'tough' world being loving may not get you were you should be. However, just the opposite is true. Think of Ganhi, for example, and what he accomplished by being confrontational in a loving way. Loving one's enemies may be difficult. But imagine what happens when you focus on the common humanity and the bond between you and them. You may gain greater understanding and insight, which can then help you in your response to their actions and in becoming more proactive in a positive way that helps everyone.

Life is communication, and love affirms and solidifies this bond. Love entrenches and furthers communication and the interaction among people.

## The We

Loving someone means you overcome the boundaries between the 'I' and 'You' to see the part we all have in common. This part is what is immutable and everlasting and within us all. It underlines the connectedness we all experience. The more we are connected we are with ourselves and others, the more we can experience love. If you feel that your lovce or another's may not be enough, you may not be seeing how deep it really is. We may be standing there with out little tender flower, that is love, and see a large mountain in front of us. But as soon as someone says the magic word 'we', the mountain can be gone with the snapping of a finger. Bound together by a common foundation of love, many little people can move mountains because they become tall in love.

If one feels lonely in the half darkness of a roadside motel, it helps to look up at the star and know that many others see them to. Too often we may wait for someone to say 'we', but this is not even needed to feel connected with the universe and with other people. It is around us, but many people many not see it because the world of what looks important seems to be taking over. So many people

suffer from anxiety, depression, and many other afflictions, because their life is not aligning with who they truly are anymore. They are chasing mirages because they think they live in a desert. But once you realise you are not in desert, there are no more illusions that need to be chased. Communicating and sharing with others within an attitude of love for what is in all of us we are not only no longer feeling alone in a desert, but we find ourselves in a very beautiful and very rich world. Communication is what makes it possible, and love is the eternal key to it.

## Knowledge

Learned facts and knowledge by themselves need not be a hindrance. They can help in applying love in better ways to make it work better in the everyday world. Turning alive love like a child but using the experience and knowledge of an adult to make it flower and flourish in the every day world is often a way that can be helpful. What sometimes seems like knowledge or insight, however, can sometimes also be deceiving and blinding us to what is real. It is just superficial knowledge, and it can cause much suffering. Much stress, anxiety, depression, and other conditions are really a result of this superficial knowledge. Since love promotes communication, it helps to break through what seems real on the outside to something more substantive on the inside. All the information we have comes from communication, and love can remove the obstacles towards getting greater insight into what is important, true love can lead to true knowledge.

## Hurt

Losing a person we love can be very traumatizing. However, interestingly, the more and authentic we love, the less is lost. If the love is towards the universal in the other person, nothing can be lost. What remains is the positive effect the person had on us. It may sound difficult to get to this point because we have to cut away all we think we love, but which is really at the surface, fickle and without much depth. Time moves on, and so does life, but the change that a person has brought about, the ripples that travel into infinity, can never be lost. To be stuck in grief is to see a static loss rather than the dynamic and ever-changing marks a soul has left on the world. As ripples will change in amplitude and speed depending on where they travel along, the depth of the water and when encountering other waves, so these ripples can change long after the pebble has hit the water. They become a part of the dynamics of life. Their energy is conserved within the infinite sea of change, where they help to give rise to new realities.

## The Journey Goes On

Life is an open journey, and so it is especially important to be open to everything that is out there. Love connects us with others and the world around. So, love is both the path and the state of the one who walks on it. Whenever you are in doubt, feel on the inside, and you will hear the voice of love. It will never leave you.



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