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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



“Once I needed to be needed. Now I just need to be loved.”

The Healing Power of Love

Relationship issues figure prominently in a large segment of the general population. Those fortunate enough to have found healthy relationships know that “love and security” isn’t a *place*, it is the realization of some of the wonderful things that can come from of a loving bond – including the respect and emotional intimacy that comes from psychological and emotional work.

Love notes are like to music to the soul. Here are some typical little “love notes” or statements people make when describing relationships that are nurturing and fulfilling:

- “Feeling loved has empowered me to believe in myself.”
- “He told me I am diamond in the rough.”
- “He brings out the best in me.”
- “She is special to me because I can say anything I want to her and she’s not going to be judgmental.”
- “I am learning to know myself and *love* the me, too.”

Believing, feeling loved, heard, and understood – emotionally *held*, so to speak – becomes a safe container allowing one’s inborn potential to blossom, even including the previously disowned and unnurtured aspects of the Self. In unhappy relationships, these hidden aspects have often played a critical (yet invisible) role in making what has turned out to be a poor love choice.

The “Work” of Healthy Love in Therapy

In spite of the sentiments expressed in romantic Valentines, heartwarming “love notes” (such as those above) are not easily come by. The real substance in loving relationships is the result of a great deal of hard work – both on the Self and on the relationship.

In my clinical practice in Encino, California, I treat many men and women who are involved in toxic and destructive relationships. Silently suffering behind invisible glass walls, their full potential is locked away inside, as though they are in an emotional prison. Twisted family dynamics in childhood where there was emotional and verbal abuse have resulted in people getting numbed to that abuse so that it feels normal, a comfortable old shoe. Some people end up in destructive “demon lover” relationships in which they feel as though they are being sucked in by an unseen energy or magnetic force. That draw makes them feel special and wanted; they get hooked. But threats, verbal abuse, put downs, shame, and blame, destroy the soul. Compounded over time, such negative messages have a trickle-down, multigenerational effect.

When the heart remains hungry for love, one learns to become a co-dependent at the sacrifice of the self. The men and women who are caught up in these traps know exactly what I'm talking about. Many continue in their dysfunctional relationship patterns of emotional and verbal abuse because it has become so familiar that they are unaware of alternatives

Sadly, people can get to the point where they believe they aren't good enough to love or be loved. They give away their "gold," unaware they even have it. By the time they enter therapy, they feel sapped, drained, and too helpless to fix their situation. At the same time, they hope for enlightenment so they can build healthier relationships, change their lives, and be freed from their destructive life patterns. As one such client, Sonia, said about her own miserable union, "He thought of me as a loyal *pet*." In the case of another client, a man named Alex, "I was always being told that I couldn't do things, that I wasn't smart enough; I didn't have enough sense." Michelle, another client, began to understand that duty and love are not the same. She states, "With my father, there were rules, 'You do as I say or else!' it as the same with my husband."

When love is a mysterious quantity, dreamed of, but never felt, it breeds a *longing* for it. The child left hungry for love, yet shamed for wanting it, survives by denying his or her own neediness, and by learning to be a co-dependent – at the sacrifice of the Self.

In the end, when does being needy, and giving love, yet knowing that it will never be reciprocated simply *get old*? When does it become too heavy for the lonely heart to bear? How long can people work to give their partners what they themselves hunger for – a sense of love and belonging?

What needs to change is the Self and the awareness of what is missing. "What is not brought to consciousness lures one as fate," said the famed psychoanalyst, Carl G. Jung. Psychotherapy chips away at the walled-off fragile parts of the Self, exposing one's inner gold at last.

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