



What is Love? How and Why Does it  
Support Our Lives from Birth to Death?

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# True love is not necessary:

*True love. Is it really necessary?* [L] [SEP]

*Tact and common sense tell us to pass over it in silence,  
like a scandal in Life's highest circles.* [L] [SEP]

*Perfectly good children are born without its help.* [L] [SEP]

*It couldn't populate the planet in a million years, [L] [SEP] it comes along so rarely.*  
[L] [SEP]

From "True Love" by Wislawa Szymborska



*Ed, 30 hours after he died*

# True love is not the same as:

**attachment bonds:** attachment (identification with the other that creates anxiety about being separate), separation anxiety, grief – both infantile and adult attachment bonds

**romance:** a psychotic illusion or fantasy (that feels like a drug) of being fulfilled or completed by another, someone who is your “perfect match”

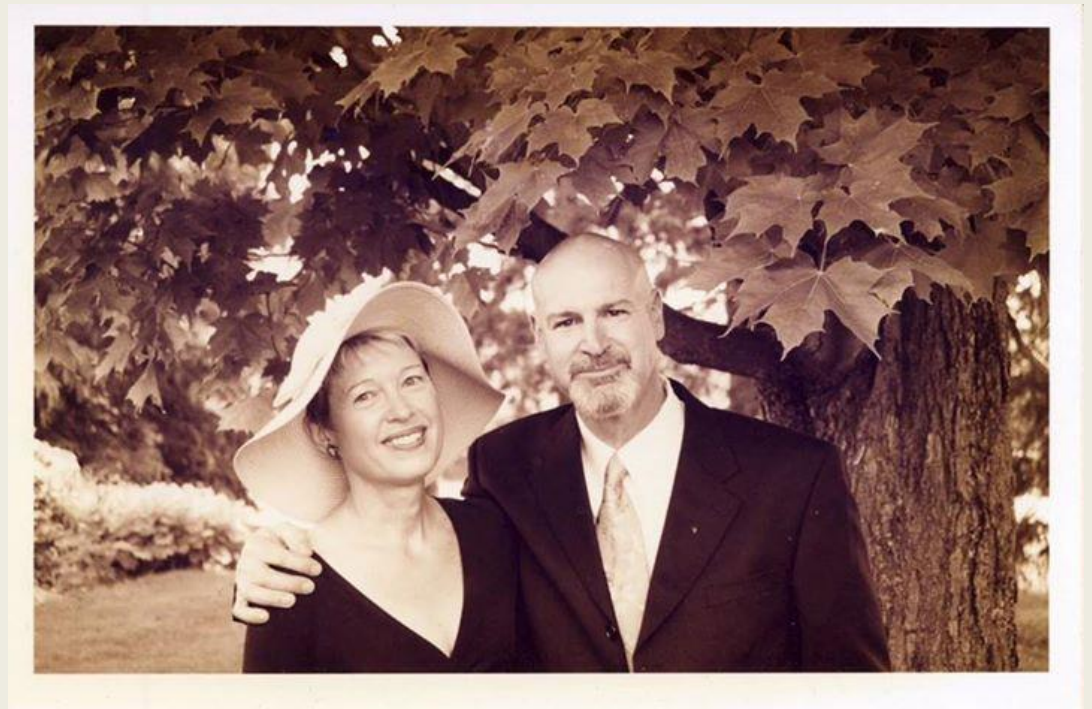
**idealization:** a fanciful love that splits off the hate or disillusionment towards another, thus omitting the reality of the other person’s limitations

**desire:** longing for something that is missing, something that is wanted, a restlessness or dissatisfaction with things as they are



# True love is NOT biological.

If love were based on a biological instinct that is rooted in survival, then it would not be so difficult for people to practice. In fact, true love is not necessary for procreation, mating or protecting our children.



*Sepia photo of Ed and me in 2001*

# The Truth of True Love: We Become an Accurate Witness

## Becoming a witness:

- knowing the beloved well
- accepting the beloved as she or he is, in reality
- holding the beloved in mind
- remaining interested and engaged over time through the changes of impermanence

## Depends on:

- Mutual, reciprocal, egalitarian communication that becomes both **mysterious and familiar**
- mindfulness, empathy, equanimity, emotional maturity, open communication and truth-telling



# True Love is Truest When It's on a Two-Way Street

**Both** people are vulnerable to it and both people can rise to the demands of commitment:

**THIS IS RARE**

*Love means to learn to look at yourself  
The way one looks at distant things  
For you are only one thing among many.  
And whoever sees that way heals his heart,  
Without knowing it, from various ills-  
A bird and a tree say to him: Friend.*

From "Love" by Czeslaw Milosz



# Love's #1 enemy is idealization

Idealization is the belief that the other person (or oneself) is perfect, complete or pure

- Parents idealize their children
- Children idealize their parents
- Romance demands idealization of the beloved
- Romantic comedy feeds on idealization
- Pornography creates idealized and controlled “objects”

**Idealization is our control of the object of our desire so that it does not become real and limited**



# Love Brings Loss

*...and whether we bear it for beast,  
for child, for woman, or friend,  
it is the one love, it is the same,  
and it is blest  
deepest by loss  
it is blest, it is blest.*

From “Oddjob, a Bull Terrier” by Derek Walcott





# Love will always break your heart

It is unsatisfactory, imperfect, impermanent, and entirely contextualized in circumstances that you do not control and can never be separate from.

For more information about love and loss, see [www.young-eisendrath.com](http://www.young-eisendrath.com)



# Through Mindfulness and Compassion, We Learn the Lessons of Love

**Mindfulness:** a kind of awareness that combines concentration and equanimity and leads to clarity of perception

**Compassion:** the ability to accompany anguish, suffering or adversity with accurate empathy and help



# Repetitive Conflict & Polarization in Love Relationships Lead to Enemy-Making

Our most useful enemies are close at hand because we can attempt to control them. We often find them among the people we are supposed to “love”: our partners, siblings, parents, children, leaders or teachers.

The stronger our ideals, the more likely we are to hate those who seem to wreck them. For example, ideals of **equality and reciprocity** are especially hard because they invite splits and competition. Polarization is a situation between equals in which attributions of intentional harm are made to the other person, justifying active and passive attacks. Close human relationships are rife with polarizations.



# Universal Relational Paradoxes that disrupt the ease of loving another:

- *Is this me or is this you?*
- *Did I do this or was it done to me?*
- *Is this now or was it then?*
- *Can I choose what I feel?*



# Unconscious Obstacles that disrupt our ability to see ourselves and our beloved clearly

## **Emotional kidnapping, Projective Identification:**

There is a "projection" of an affective or subtle emotional narrative into the other person and then there seems to be "identification" in the other person so that the projected material is evoked.

The other person responds defensively, but often this response seems to "confirm" the projection. Universal relational paradoxes begin to take over and deaden the vitality of connection.

Person A becomes the Director of Person's B "Internal Theater" in which Person B plays an unknown part in Person A's Internal Theatre.

The two people experience a "hall of mirrors":



## *Real Dialogue Creates a Mindful Gap*

Special kind of conversation that permits those in conflict to create a “mindful space” or to “mind the gap” between them. Three fundamental skills:

- 1. *Speaking for yourself*:** connect to your own subjectivity, feel your feelings, and know what is going on within you, and speak in a way that is both kind and authentic. This requires clarity, equanimity and empathy.
- 2. *Paraphrasing before responding*:** step into the other’s words and experiences and find out if you understand before you respond. Always check as to whether you have the gist.
- 3. *Remaining curious and modest*:** Keep in mind Self/Other are co-created.



# Personal Love is a Spiritual Practice

1. Practice mindfulness and compassion with your beloved and yourself
2. Recognize that you do NOT KNOW yourself and need a mirror to see yourself
3. Seeing and accepting your beloved allows you to find yourself through trusting another to reflect you back
4. Recognize that you are unconsciously motivated by early emotional habits, just as your beloved is, and that you can fall into projective identification as easily as your beloved can
5. Practice Real Dialogue: Speaking for Yourself, Listening Mindfully, Remaining Curious
6. Return to CURIOSITY about yourself and your beloved as often as you can – a fundamental NOT KNOWING
7. Remember that love is a difficult path, but will reward you with the feeling of having been seen and known



# Let go of the division between Transpersonal Love and Personal Love

When mutual personal love becomes a spiritual practice, as Cynthia Bourgeault (a Christian hermit) reminds us, it means “baring one’s heart with particularity. This is the path of transformational love and it puts a human face on the Transcendent.”

True love is felt as raw vulnerability with our own needs and desires exposed. True love opposes control of the beloved while strengthening your need and dependence on the relationship for your own foundation.

You see into another person so specifically and so deeply that you see through him or her to whatever you take to be the Divine Source, refracted back again through your own self.





# Cherishment: Love on a One-Way Street

True love is mutual and reciprocal (both people are dependent and vulnerable), but love can also be cherishing another who cannot return the care and support. “Cherishing” is the term I use for keeping and holding someone dear, cultivating your affection and compassion for that person. It is different from mere “care-giving” in that cherishing has pleasure at its core. We feel pleasure in becoming a witness.



*Peony and Ed in the spring of 2014*



# Cherishment is Non-reciprocal Love

- practiced in parent-child relationships
- practiced in therapeutic relationships
- practiced when caring for animals
- practiced when caring for those who are ill or infirm or cannot reciprocate



*Amber, Richard, myself and Ed  
in the winter of 2011*

# Cherishing does not require a whole self or vulnerability:

There is a great deal of pleasure in cherishing another when we come to know that person as a particular being with strengths, weakness, needs and character. We feel pride and joy in seeing our beloved thrive.

In true love, we are vulnerable and open-hearted, and in need of the other person's reflection, desire and interest. Cherishing, love on a one-way street, is a lot less stressful and touchy than love on a two-way street.

Many people hide from true love all of their lives (even if they learn to cherish others) and are afraid of being known in this intimate way, even if they long for it. Notably, some spiritual teachers and masters never make themselves vulnerable to personal love AND idealization of a spiritual teacher guarantees love on a one-way street.



# In your family, there may be cherishment, but not true love.

Because true love is demanding, radical, and spiritual, its practice is not widespread. Families can function well without it and in some cultures – for example, in China and Japan – it is discouraged between spouses because it is thought to be wrong to become preoccupied with a spouse.



*Richard, Ed and I in the summer of 2012*

# You Must Be Able to Do Three Things

*Every year  
everything  
I have ever learned  
  
in my lifetime  
leads back to this: the fires  
and the black river of loss  
whose other side  
  
is salvation,  
whose meaning  
none of us will ever know.  
To live in this world*

*you must be able  
to do three things:  
to love what is mortal;  
to hold it  
  
against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it;  
and, when the time comes to let it go,  
to let it go.*

from “In the Blackwater Woods” by  
Mary Oliver



Thank You.



*Ed and me in the summer of 2013*

