

What is True Love?

Romantic love is the story of how you need another person to complete you. It's an absolutely insane story. (Byron Katie)

At this time of year, whether we like it or not, we are faced with Valentine's Day merchandise popping up everywhere to remind us that February is supposed to be all about romantic love. So this month, I am going to write a rather challenging message pointing out the key difference between what most humans call love and true love.

What we normally call love in our society is a feeling that we are so attracted to someone, or so dependent on them, that we really believe we need them in our lives for us to be happy. 'I cannot live without you! You complete me! You are my sunshine!' Well I am sorry to burst this romantic illusion, but sentiments like these are not true love at all because they are based on our deep sense of unworthiness and neediness, rather than open-hearted connection based on wholeness and abundance.

Romantic love is actually a really powerful type of egoic desire or egoic neediness. We may think that we are not addicts because we are not addicted to alcohol or drugs, but virtually all of us are addicted to seeking love or approval from those around us. If we are honest with ourselves, we can probably quite easily recall several occasions in our past when we twisted ourselves into pretzels in an attempt to win someone's love or approval.

When Gloria was dating the man who became her second husband, she pretended to be fascinated by his Ph.D. subject - inorganic chemistry - when in reality, she did not have a clue what he was talking about. Another example from my own past is the time - many moons ago - when I tried to wear horribly uncomfortable 'sexy' underwear because the then man in my life had complained that I wore granny knickers!!

You might like to pause here and look back on your own past relationships to make a brief list of what you did with a partner, or potential partner, that you really did not enjoy doing in order to try and please them. But as you do this, please, *please* do not feel the slightest bit guilty or ashamed of your past behaviour. We have all been programmed from a very young age to seek external approval. Then, we automatically act out this programming over and over again throughout our adult life, until someone, or some spiritual guide book comes along and points out that all our attempts to gain others' approval are pointless, and even worse, soul destroying!

The weird thing is we all keep putting on some kind of fake front in order to gain others' love or approval, even though we all know from bitter experience that this never really works well at all in the long run. The romantic partner, whom we tried so hard to please, still left us in the lurch. The boss whom we kept trying to appease still shouted at us. The teacher whom we tried so desperately to impress still said something cutting about us in front of the whole class. Of course from time to time, it did appear that our desperate

attempts to impress someone were working and then we experienced the temporary thrill of gaining their love or approval. But all that had really happened was that just for a short while, we stopped feeling unworthy of love and opened our hearts fully to experiencing love and wholeness – all the while wrongly assuming that this fabulous experience was down to meeting ‘Mr Right’ or ‘Miss Right’.

Now let’s turn our attention from our deeply ingrained habit of trying to gain someone’s love or approval to what it feels like when someone is trying desperately hard to impress us. Let’s be honest here too and admit that we actually secretly despise someone who turns themselves inside out in order to try and win our approval. Someone will do absolutely anything for us because they ‘adore’ us so much, and secretly, or not so secretly, we fantasise about trading them in for someone better!

So why do we still tend to blindly go on trying so hard to please our other-half when it comes to our own love life? Because – and this needs to be repeated several times before we start to get it - we were programmed as young children to seek approval from our parents or caregivers and later to seek approval from virtually everyone we met. Then, we inevitably became addicted to the thrill we experienced when we temporarily got someone’s approval. At the same time, we desperately tried to avoid the horrible feeling of anxiety or grief that we experienced when we lost their approval.

It is as though we have all been hypnotised to believe that without someone on the outside of us giving us their love or approval, we could not survive. Now of course, it is a biological fact of life that babies and very young children who are given no love at all do not thrive and may even suffer severe brain damage. But we are not just biological creatures. On a much deeper level, we are all eternal souls experiencing a dream life as a human being in a physical body. And guess what? All of us are made of love and nothing but love. Or, as *A Course in Miracles* puts it:

Love which created me, is what I am.

In reality, we are all made of love. But tragically, we have all totally forgotten our true nature and so now we search desperately for love in the world around us, without having a clue that the love that we seek is already deep within us. The only tried and tested way I know to remember our true nature as loving/loved souls is to still our thinking minds for a while so that we can go deep within until we touch the core of our being and miraculously discover that at our core we are pure love and nothing but love.

This is why I am now addicted to meditating with spiritual teachers whose own open-hearted, loving presence naturally triggers my own heart to open up to the love at the core of my being. When I reach this peak level of consciousness, I find that I am naturally in love with all sentient beings – including trees, birds, donkeys and even bugs! This sense of being

united in love energy with everyone and everything around me is the greatest high I have ever experienced in life – even greater than the first time I fell deeply in love with a man.

Because I have experienced opening into this type of unconditional, indiscriminate love many times now, I am finally beginning to give up my own addiction to seeking other human beings' love and approval –although I know I still have quite a way to go before I can truly say I am no longer a love addict or an approval addict.

Now please do not get the wrong end of the stick here. Freeing ourselves from being addicted to seeking others' love and approval in no way means that we have to give up loving relationships with other human beings. In fact, the more we stop looking for love from others, the more we are likely to experience incredibly fulfilling, fear-free loving connections with others. Giving up our addiction to others' approval just means that we no longer *need* their love to be deeply happy and fulfilled.

Because I have gained so much from learning to distinguish true love from needy attachments, I now really want to share what I have discovered about true, totally fearless love with those of you who may still be at least a bit addicted to the thrills and spills of seeking love and/or approval from other human beings.

So, if this month, you would like to explore the great joy and freedom that arise when we finally begin to give up our addiction to seeking others' love or approval, I suggest that you spend a little time contemplating on the ways in which you have sought others' love or approval in the past and gently looking at the long-term results of your efforts. I also strongly recommend that you read one or both of two books that have really helped me to understand the difference between the pain of constantly trying to get other human beings' love and approval and the incredible joy of connecting to an endless well of unconditional love that lies deep within all of us and is even in the air that we breathe. These two potentially life-changing books are:

Byron Katie, *I Need Your Love - Is that True?*

Anthony de Mello, *Rediscovering Life*

Happy Reading and Happy Valentine's Day!

Peggy Foster
February 2019