

The Secret to a Great Love

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We all want and need love. It's inherent in our very being. To the extent that we've experienced it makes it easy to give and accept.

For those of us who grew up in loving environments, the ability to love is second nature and we're able to attract, give, and receive love. Many of us however grew up in families where love wasn't shown, so we not only didn't get the nurturing that should have been our natural birthright, but we never got the modeling for how to love. We then had to find ways to learn this later in life, which for some of us has been the dominant learning journey of our lifetime.

I've heard it said that in this life we have the chance for one great love, a love that is unconditional, that captures our imagination, and that thrills us to our very depths. Whether this is in fact true, I can't help but wonder, "What is it that makes this kind of love possible?" Is it a fantastical romantic quality of an almost obsessive nature, or a delicious passion seemingly undiluted over time or the depth of emotion that reverberates throughout one's entire being? Although it may be any or all of these, what appears to be consistent in a great love are two fundamental ingredients: essence and commitment.

Essence is what makes a thing itself. The essence of love would be those demonstrable actions that are experienced as genuine caring and kindness, generosity

of spirit, compassion, patience, curiosity and interest, and affection and/or passionate desire (if it's a romantic love). For those of us where love was all around, we learned many of these characteristics by osmosis and were able to naturally live and give these essentials. But many of us instead have had to learn and practice these in order to make them real, usually in our early adulthood where we found the

opportunities outside our families. For some us it's that first real relationship or perhaps a marriage (albeit sometimes a training one). But it's something that needs to be practiced in order to counter our negative imprinting and over time begins to rewire our neural pathways toward acting in more loving ways.

This is where commitment comes in, because to do that can be difficult; it feels like it goes against our grain, or what is familiar.

We as humans grow with great reluctance and we often resent

those who force us toward our growth. This is why the road to loving can be fraught with everything from disinterest to ambivalence to downright resistance, (thought of as the fear of intimacy), as written about so well in Scott Peck's brilliant book, *The Road Less Traveled*. In order to overcome any fear there has to be a full commitment or there will never be enough focus or energy required to undo some of these very deep default patterns.



Our commitment to loving is what will enable us to give the very thing we want, which almost magically we find being returned. However, it can be hard to give something we never received much of. We can learn though, through the examples of great love throughout history in wonderful literature and art, and in the music and film of today so as to inspire our own unique sense of love that is already in our hearts and so inherent in our humanity.

We can also make a decision to simply start loving more, whether we currently have a partner or not. We can start by loving our families (won't many of them be surprised!), our co-workers (oh boy!), and the people with whom we have the simplest, most basic of interactions on an everyday basis (how wonderful for them!). Here's where we can actually have a love affair with the world, so that what we see and feel can be imbued with a sense of wonder, appreciation, and even sacredness. Start with where you are sitting right now and allow your gaze to rest on each person or thing you see in such a way that says, "I totally accept and love you as you are."

Notice how you begin to feel inside yourself, how your focus on loving kindness, patience, and unconditional positive regard starts to create a fundamental shift in your own perception and being. I think you'll see the world starting to change around you, as people begin responding differently, perhaps with some confusion at first. They may even say, "Hey, that's not you," which is true, because the self they've gotten accustomed to isn't really you, but a version of you, a brilliant cover created in order to survive in the world. What will begin to shine through is your authentic self, your own loving nature, something that we are all born with.

We can all make a choice to love, to demonstrate the essence of love and to commit to being a loving presence in the world. We can make it at any time, and we can remember each time we forget and recommit, so that we can watch how this love affair with the world begins to transform all of our relationships into great loves, ones that last for all time.



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