

# *What is Love?*

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## **Chapter 1**

### **The Quest for Love**

**What** love is, in all its mysteriousness, the great poets and novelists have already expressed far more eloquently than I could. This book is not about love itself, but about how to find it.

Love is the energy that connects us to other people and to life itself. Even though we all inhabit separate bodies, there are times when this sense of separation dissolves. This can happen within a group – at work or in sport, at family gatherings or amongst friends – and it can happen between individuals or in nature. The experience of love can, at times, be something quiet and unspoken, and at other times blissful and euphoric.

Love is nourishment for the heart and soul. Without it we feel our separation from others as painful and lonely. We may live a life of physical comfort, with lots of activity to stimulate the body and mind, yet we will still feel acutely that something is missing.

We need to understand what that ache of ‘something missing’ is. We may attempt to dull it through work, food, sex, alcohol, entertainment etc, yet in our most honest moments we know that we are just trying to distract ourselves, and that none of these things will satisfy our deepest need.

The quest for love starts when we admit this need to ourselves, and make a decision to do whatever is necessary to find the love we long for. So long as we continue to distract ourselves, and deny our needs, nothing can happen. Once a clear decision on our part is made, then life starts to support us in all sorts of surprising ways – as if it had just been waiting for us to ask.

The heart and soul will never be satisfied with the mundane. The dissatisfaction we feel with the ordinary, material things of life is not a trivial thing. It is what in India was known as ‘divine discontent’ – the discontent that the soul feels with life in its purely physical, earthly form. It is the voice of the divine within us, motivating us to go and find that which we are longing for.

#### **Divine Discontent**

When we feel discontent with our lives, we often misinterpret this feeling. We think our dis-satisfaction comes from the fact that our outer circumstances are not as good as they could be. If we could just get a better job, a bigger house and so on – then satisfaction will be ours. Yet if we do manage to improve our circumstances, we often find that, after an initial euphoria, our discontent returns. We may even acquire all the trimmings – the harbour-side apartment, wardrobes filled with Armani and Versace labels, the platinum Amex, gold Rolex and so on. The surface of our lives may become beautifully decorated, and our self-image highly polished, yet the effort to achieve all this will only exhaust us, and alienate us even further from ourselves.

Many people have become so mesmerised by outward appearances that they no longer feel what is happening inside. Whatever sense of discontent they may have is ignored, or not given any credibility. They may think it is due to some quirk in themselves that they can't be as happy as everyone else seems to be. We seem to have lost all ability for self-reflection and self-analysis.

Our society has become characterised by the search for satisfaction in material things. In ancient India, when people spoke of 'divine discontent', there was a clear recognition that the material things of life could not satisfy the needs of the heart and soul. Nowadays, this clarity of understanding is much less common. Instead, we live in denial of our feelings, and we barely know what is happening in our hearts, or what our needs on this level are.

When this connection with the heart is missing, our lives lose direction. Our relationships suffer, our intuition no longer guides us and we lack a sense of purpose and meaning. We become more centred in our heads than in our hearts. As a result, we approach our relationships and all of the dilemmas and perplexities of life in an analytical and cerebral way. We rely more and more on our intellects to solve all of the problems in our lives, including matters of the heart.

The brain and the heart are two very different organs. Our intellect can solve practical problems – even very complex ones – but not issues related to the heart. A different sensitivity and awareness is required for this. Using the intellect to deal with the heart is like using a computer to open a bottle of wine. A computer may tell you that a corkscrew is needed, and even where to buy one, but it won't open the bottle for you. Unless you take the necessary steps to get hold of a corkscrew and use it, your love will remain all bottled up.

The first step that anyone who is interested in the wine of love will need to take is some self-reflection. To reflect on what the values are that are guiding your life at present, and to honestly admit how your current lifestyle makes you feel. To give up any denial, and to be unafraid of discontent, if it is there.

Some intelligent reflection will reveal to you the same ancient truth – that no matter what the material circumstances of your life are, nothing on the material plane is capable of giving you what you need on the heart level. The starting point in the quest for love is the acknowledgement of our 'divine discontent' – our coming to recognise that material things never give any lasting satisfaction. Then the search for the corkscrew can begin.

## **Love and Soul's Purpose**

If love is missing from our lives, it is not necessarily a sign that something has gone 'wrong'. Often, it is a part of our soul's purpose to experience the absence of love. It is said that you don't know what you've got till it's gone – and this is certainly true about love. It is my belief, and the essence of most spiritual teachings, that our spiritual purpose as human beings is to evolve into consciousness. The Buddha, Christ, Lao Tzu, and many others taught that the awakening into consciousness, the flowering into our transcendental Self, is the highest peak of human evolution. The soul incarnates into a physical body to learn and experience what it needs to on this journey to awakening. One of the most potent methods life has of raising our consciousness is to deprive us of something that we have been taking for granted.

So at times we find ourselves without personal power, or freedom, or love, or any other aspect of ourselves that we have so far failed to fully appreciate consciously. Often, we will co-operate with this process, neglecting or turning our backs on love in an almost deliberate fashion. In our ignorance of love, we become arrogant, judgemental and ego-centred. As our vanity grows, so does our isolation. Eventually we find ourselves in a painful

place, lonely and depressed. It may take us some time to face up to this pain, but from the point of view of our soul's purpose this is exactly where we are meant to be – lonely, isolated, depressed and hurting like mad.

Eventually, we are forced to face some tough questions. 'How did I get here?' 'Why am I hurting?' and 'What is missing from my life?'

Once we have recognised what is missing, and admitted our need for love, our arrogance starts to subside. It is a humbling recognition. This newfound humility opens us up to a recognition of what life has to offer. The quest to find love becomes a conscious one, which is what the evolutionary forces of life want us to do – to become conscious of love. We begin to rediscover love in a conscious way. We learn about the nature of love, how to cultivate it in different situations, how to express it, how to give and receive it. And we learn to recognise its value on the heart and soul level – and to appreciate and cherish it, as and when it arises.

## Love and Consciousness

I believe it is fair to say that much of the love we experience in our lives, both individually and collectively, is unconscious. We don't really know and appreciate the love we have for someone till they are gone – either to the other world, or to some other part of this world.

As a society, our understanding about love is still limited – and this is especially true when it comes to relationships between men and women. You don't have to look very far to see that the male-female relationship is not functioning at its fullest potential in our society. A lot of ignore-ance about the nature of love still exists.

This ignorance has its roots in our society's traditional belief in the sanctity of marriage. For both religious and social reasons, our culture was always far more interested in keeping a marriage together, than it was in the wellbeing of the two souls caught in the marriage. Longevity, perseverance, commitment, endurance and diamond anniversaries scored far more brownie points than did the amount of love the couple experienced together. Marriage was like a marathon race – you had to run through the pain to get the prize. The actual process of cultivating love – how this was done – was given little attention. Traditionally, you were left to your own devices to muddle through as best you could.

Those of us who were brought up in such a marital feat of endurance could see from our ringside seats that there wasn't much love going on. These two contenders for the Diamond Anniversary Championship were hitting the wall at regular intervals. At other times they were just hitting each other. Or else chasing each other with malicious intent. It was the Triathlon to end all Triathlons. Fifty years of commitment to a wasteland devoid of love.

Even if this is a slight exaggeration, the point is that there was a considerable amount of ignore-ance of love back in those bad old days.

Unfortunately, this ignorance still persists to a large extent today. Many people nowadays still consider longevity to be the hallmark of a loving relationship. Love is still equated with commitment. Psychologists and therapists continue to perpetuate this myth. '*Why Men Cant Love*' by Stephen Carter, and "*Why Men Wont Commit*" by George Weinberg are two recent books that are based on the assumption that love equals commitment.

While there is a truth in this - love does bring with it a sense of commitment - the commitment that comes from the heart is very different from the kind of commitment that these authors speak about. The difference is subtle, but of profound importance to our understanding of the ways of the heart and the dynamics of a relationship. In this opening chapter I want to look a little more closely at the difference between the two types of

commitment. A lack of understanding of this difference is one of the main causes of the confusion many people still have about relationships.

## **Love and Commitment**

One of the qualities of love is benevolence. A genuine love brings with it a spontaneous wish to do whatever we can for the wellbeing of the person we love. In our hearts we feel that we will always be there for them if they ever need us. This is akin to a commitment. But it is a commitment that is freely given. Love of this kind only flourishes in a climate of non-possessiveness, in which the freedom of each person is fully respected. We cannot ask for, expect, or demand a commitment of this nature.

If someone who loves us offers this kind of support, we will be reluctant to accept it from them. Our love for them will be hesitant to burden them in any sort of way. True love, on both sides, is primarily concerned with the happiness of the beloved. Our own welfare is secondary to this. A lover does not consider his or her own personal agenda. Their concern is for the other person.

This doesn't mean that we become martyrs, or that we force ourselves into making great personal sacrifices. It simply means that we have a lot to give, and the other person has inspired in us the wish to give. Lovers are being true to the deepest part of themselves – to what is in their hearts.

For convenience, let's put a label on this kind of commitment. Let's call it the TOC (True to Oneself Commitment).

There is another kind of commitment. This is the traditional committed relationship in which two persons come together, each with their own needs, wishes and personal agenda. Rather than waiting for a sense of commitment to arise between them spontaneously, from the heart, they enter the relationship with a desire or expectation of where they want the relationship to go. There may be an initial attraction, and a falling in love. This will then trigger off their own personal wishes of what they want from the relationship. Here, each person is more concerned with themselves than they are with the other person. One of the people in this relationship will most likely be far more reluctant to make a commitment than the other. There will be a lot of discussion, debate, argument etc along the lines of 'how much do you really care about me'. Whatever commitment arises out of this situation will be one that is negotiated to satisfy each person's needs. It will not have the same quality of the heart-felt, freely given commitment described above.

Let's call this second type of commitment the TAC (Traditional Agenda-based Commitment).

The TAC is the type of committed relationship that most people enter into. What are the personal agendas that people bring into a relationship of this kind?

## **The Agenda-based Commitment**

The first thing we notice about personal agendas is that what women have on their list is very different from what men have.

In a traditional relationship, the woman's main concern was for security. She was at a financial disadvantage to the man, and relied on a committed relationship to take care of her survival needs. The man wanted sex, and maybe some sort of status. Men had the financial clout, and the woman had the desirable body. They seemed to be perfectly matched! Women

were cautioned to withhold sex till the man had made at least a commitment, if not an offer of marriage. A committed relationship was a way in which both partners could get their basic needs met.

Nowadays, the woman's personal agenda has changed. She still wants security, but mostly she can take care of her own financial needs. She is getting more interested in sex for its own sake, rather than as a bargaining chip. However, for her sex and love go hand in hand. She now looks for commitment as a sign of love.

The mistake she makes is to follow her mother's advice on how to go about getting this commitment. Her mother has told her not to trust men, that they are only after one thing, and that she should insist on a commitment to make sure the man has the right intentions (incidentally, both of the authors quoted above offer women the same advice). She is confused about what love is, and how to create love in a relationship. By following mum's advice, she manages to frighten a lot of men away.

Men, nowadays, still want sex. They continue to enjoy a financial advantage over women. They don't feel the same need for security that women feel. Men want freedom, but they also need love and intimacy. However, they are afraid to express this need. Firstly because, being men, they are afraid to express any sort of need or vulnerability. And secondly, because they fear that if they do express this need, their partner will ask for a commitment from them. Not a TOC commitment, but a TAC commitment, which is something that is very low on their agenda. So they use sex as a way of snatching some sort of emotional nurturing for themselves, and remain very guarded about what is happening in their hearts.

What happens in a conventional TAC type relationship is that whatever love was there at the beginning starts to decline. At first, there was no commitment. There was an attraction, and a mutual discovery of compatibility. A romantic glow developed. The two people fell in love. There was delight in each other's company, perhaps following on from a period of personal aloneness. All of this happened spontaneously, with no expectations.

Then our social conditioning, and our own fantasies about love, step in. If the pink-bubble romantic glow continues to appear in the next few meetings, thoughts about the future start to occupy us, and the question of commitment comes up. 'Will the relationship last?' 'Will he want to commit?'

When a commitment is finally agreed to, then the actual love that is experienced in the relationship usually starts to decline. The main reason for this is that the commitment came from the head rather than from the heart. No space and freedom was given to allow a sense of commitment to develop within the heart. Each person has been more concerned with his or her own needs rather than with cultivating love.

Another reason love declines in a conventionally committed relationship is that we continue to expect it. At first, the pink bubble world arose spontaneously. We were not thinking about it, or expecting it. *It is the nature of love to be spontaneous and to be experienced in the Now.* In a TAC relationship, when we commit to someone, as well as committing to practical sharing and support, we are making a promise that love will continue to arise spontaneously in us in the future. We are confused about what we can realistically expect from this kind of commitment, and what we cannot. Obviously, this is a promise that is impossible to fulfil.

When the future arrives, what do we do? We could be in any sort of unforeseen condition – overstretched at work, depressed, coping with sick parents, facing bankruptcy. At best we can try to fulfil our promise. We share the shopping and the cooking. We try to be caring and attentive. We continue to give practical support. We go to the movies together. But we find that less and less of our hearts are involved in these activities. Our mutual support

becomes a kind of a trade off. Rather than giving from the heart, we start keeping score of who has done what.

We feel our partner slipping away emotionally. If they give attention to someone else, we get jealous. Arguments develop. We want to know where they have been, why they are late. The pink bubble world is almost completely gone. In its place there is at best a sense of domestic comfort and security, and at worst frustration, demands and hostility.

This is the reality of most conventionally committed relationships. A committed relationship is not the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that we imagine it to be. A relationship of this kind only makes sense if what you want is security and the sharing of financial burdens. Usually the man gives financial support and the woman gives emotional support. This is OK as far as it goes. Some people are reasonably content with this kind of arrangement. One should however, be clear about what this kind of relationship can and cannot deliver. It may deliver security, but rarely love.

It is true that we all need a sense of security in our lives – a place to live, an environment that is safe, financial stability and so on. However, as we will see in the next chapter, these needs have nothing to do with the heart. They are basic survival needs. The conventional form of commitment that many people seek in a relationship can take care of these needs for security. The needs of the heart, however, are something very different. A simple act of commitment to a relationship is no guarantee that the needs of the heart will continue to be met. In fact, the opposite is more likely to be the case.

Some people will say that ‘If he loved me, he would want to take care of me’. This may be true if the love is equally present from both sides. But if one person senses that the other has an agenda, however unspoken, then their generosity is likely to come under some fairly thorough re-assessment. Furthermore, romantic love is a superficial kind of love. It lacks stability and depth. In the beginning it gives rise to dreams and fantasies, and by the end of the honeymoon it has mostly evaporated. It is not the sort of love that will give rise to the heart-felt sense of commitment we have spoken about.

Holding someone to a promise they have given under these circumstances is harmful to both persons. By not respecting and honouring the other person’s freedom, you are also denying and foregoing your own freedom. There is always a quiet resentment that accumulates in someone who is obliged to keep a commitment they no longer feel in their heart. At the same time, you are foregoing your own freedom to find a love that is willingly given and shared. More harm has been done, in terms of accumulated resentment, by people following ‘obligations’ than by those following their own freedom and soul’s purpose.

## **Non-committed Relationships**

There has been a recognition in some sections of the community that conventional TAC type relationships don’t give the heart a chance to blossom - that they are too prone to strangling the love that is there with expectations, possessiveness and so on. In recent times, some people have moved away from commitment in relationships. Different ways of relating are being explored in which the couple are together, but in a non-committed way - serial monogamy, open relationships, relationships with separate living arrangements etc. However, as anyone involved in these kinds of relationship will testify, just removing the commitment clause from a relationship is no guarantee that a loving connection will flourish.

What tends to happen in non-committed relationships is that, when issues and disagreements arise, rather than facing them and working through them, we project our sense of discomfort/uneasiness onto the other person. We start to blame them for making us feel less than great. We find some fault in them, and convince ourselves that it is their

shortcomings that are making us feel bad. We are unwilling to recognise that, if we feel bad, it is almost always our responsibility. Even if our partner has some shortcomings, as they inevitably will, it is *our lack of tolerance and acceptance* that makes us feel bad – not their shortcomings.

To leave a relationship when things are not going well is to avoid one of the great opportunities that relationships provide – the opportunity to grow. While there are individual differences between people, and we will have more compatibility with some than with others, it is also true that in each woman you will find all women and in each man you will find all men. So once you have found someone compatible, it is best to stick with them and work through your issues – until you can love and accept the other person as much as you love and accept yourself. Otherwise, if we leave them and start looking for someone else, we are just postponing the inevitable moment when *our issues* have to be faced.

There is more to creating love than simply giving space and freedom. It is a good beginning, but if relationships between men and women are to evolve into a more genuinely loving connection – something that many people are now searching for – then more understanding about the nature of love, and how to cultivate it, is required.

## **The Quest For Love**

What, then, is to be done? We may recognise the desirability of a TOC type of relationship, and the futility of the TAC type. Yet if we are like the majority of people, we also recognise that our actual relationships have been more like TACs than like TOCs.

This is where the quest for love comes in. We begin the quest for love with the recognition that we have not yet attained the kind of opening of the heart that we aspire to. We make the TOC type of relationship one that we aspire to experience. We set about informing ourselves as to how love of this kind can be attained. We recognise that the conventional type of commitment in a relationship is not going to bring us the love we want, and we make a decision NOT to introduce this into any of our future relationships. We may negotiate commitments of a practical nature, but never of an emotional nature. If such a commitment is part of our current relationship, we negotiate a way out of it with our partner. If we have a commitment in our current relationship to providing practical support – house payments, child support etc - we continue to fulfil this commitment. However, we make it clear to our partner that whatever transpires between us on the level of the heart can only do so in a climate of respect for each other's freedom. And from now on we will not be available to any demands or expectations from them of an emotional nature. Neither will we place any further expectations of this nature on them.

The quest for love is a commitment to find the truth of love, and to express this in one's life. It is a willingness to honestly examine our own ignorance and blind spots, and to give them up and embrace the truth. It is precisely because there still exists today a lot of ignorance about love, and because we manage to block love in all sorts of unconscious ways, that it has become meaningful to speak of a quest for love.

The quest for love is an heroic quest. We are battling against our own unconscious tendencies, against a lot of personal and cultural baggage, against popular public opinion, and even at times against our partner's blind spots. However, when we remain true to love, and our partner starts to recognise this, an unshakeable strength of spirit starts to arise in us, and we gain a new and deeper appreciation in their eyes.

This is the kind of commitment that we can now offer each other – a commitment to create and cultivate love. The traditional form of commitment will not work. Hopping from one partner to another without commitment also does not work. A relationship in which both

partners are committed to understanding themselves and exploring the true nature of love, in a mutually respectful and trusting way, will bring about a transformation in both - a transformation from unconscious into conscious lovers. We can call this kind of commitment the TIC (Transforming the Inner-self Commitment).

### **From a TIC to a TOC**

The TIC commitment is a transitional one – a commitment to transform ourselves from the TAC state to the TOC state. We are using a TIC to get to the TOC. This is the essence of the quest for love – to give up TAC and go TIC-TOC. And you will find that after only one TIC-TOC, the clock stops. We enter the timeless dimension of love.

Love is an opening of the heart to someone or some thing. It is a dissolving of the sense of separation between ourselves and another. This connecting with another is something that is both timeless, and that comes and goes in time. When it happens, time stops. We find ourselves deliciously suspended in a timeless Now. Only this moment exists. The wonder of love is its immediacy, its ability to make us feel fully alive in the present.

In the Now, we catch a glimpse of the eternal – the dimension beyond time. We have the sense that this moment could go on forever. When we open our hearts to someone, and share love, a kind of magical forever-ness envelops us, in which time ceases.

### **The Male and Female TIC**

The quest for love will in many respects be the same for both men and women, but there will also be some differences.

For men it will be easier to give up the TAC type of relationship. It will be a relief for them. The difficulty for men will be taking on the inner exploration involved in a TIC relationship.

For women, the opposite is true. They will find greater difficulty in giving up the security of a TAC relationship. However, the work of inner exploration, and transforming one's attitudes and feelings about the nature of love is something that will come more easily to them.

Hence men and women can be of great assistance to each other in a TIC relationship. The man can help the woman give up her attachment to the TAC aspects of a relationship. He does this by simply being firm in refusing to accept from her any of her habitual tendencies to form attachments, to be possessive, and especially to ask for a commitment to the future. He can help her to remain in the Now, in the present moment, and refuse to indulge her tendency to seek emotional security for the future.

At the same time, the woman can help the man to get more in touch with his feelings in the Now. To acknowledge and accept with honesty what is going on inside him. To stop him from glossing over, rationalising or denying his feelings. The first step in transforming oneself is to honestly recognise and accept where you are right now. Feelings only happen in the Now. Getting in touch with feelings brings us into the Now. Honestly expressing feelings opens us up – it makes us vulnerable. This is where men have the most difficulty – yet love can only be shared in a state of vulnerability.

So the role of both partners is to keep each other in the Now. By staying in the Now, we are creating the right conditions in which the heart may open. Love only happens in the Now. It will be easier for a man to open up in the Now if he knows that it is not going to tie him down to a lifetime of demands and expectations. And it will be easier for a woman to

open up in the Now, if she feels that her man is right there, present with her, offering her what is in his heart.

The challenge for men will be to bring transformation to their sexual energy. To raise their energy from the sex centre to the heart. It is not enough for a man just to honestly share with his partner that he is feeling turned on. To be a slave to sex is to be a slave to one's biology, to one's basic instinctual nature. If one is a slave to one's biology, one is at the same level that animals are. This condition lacks any sort of human dignity or nobility.

Men need to reclaim their manhood. This means to reclaim their right to be free to love. To resist the woman's enslaving demands for a commitment, and to insist on his right to find love in his own way – not for her sake, but for his own.

To offer a traditional commitment to a woman is not heroic – it is weak. You are just trading your freedom for regular sex. Even if your woman has insisted on it, she will not respect you for it. Intuitively she will sense your weakness, and you'll be one more rooster whose only reward for all his troubles is to be hen-pecked.

However, once she recognises your strength, and your commitment to transforming your energy and to be true to love, her attitude to you will change.

The challenge for women is to transform their fear-based need for security into love. Fear is a woman's biggest enemy, and greatest challenge. It comes from the same over-identification with the physical body that the man has. Men get attached to the sexual instinct in the body, whereas women get identified with its survival instinct – but both are stuck with the instinctual, animal side of their nature.

In the PR war between the sexes, women have managed a huge victory. They have managed to make their fear-based desire for commitment look respectable, while at the same time making the man's sex based desires look mean and selfish. Women need to understand that their fear-based desire for commitment is as self-centred as a man's sexual desire – and to see that it is not going to bring them any love. They need to develop the strength and the trust to give it up, and transform their fear into love.

So the quest for love for both men and women is simple. Simple to say, but not easy to do. For the man, it is to transform his sexual energy into love. For a woman, it is to transform her fear into love. Of course, this is speaking in generalities, and there will be exceptions to this. Every man has his share of fear, and every woman has her share of sexuality. For each, it is both fear and sexual attachment that needs to be transformed.

How this can be done is what the rest of this book is about.