

What Is Love? – Introduction



This book is about how you can bring more love into your life. It is a common, yet puzzling experience to see both our own and other people's relationships start to flounder after some time. We all enter our relationships with great hopes and the best of intentions – and yet we often find ourselves getting bogged down in arguments, disappointments, demands, possessiveness, boredom and other relationship pitfalls. The love that was there in the beginning so often gets trampled under by each person's frustrated expectations. It's not that we can avoid these pitfalls. Everyone will experience their share of frustration, disappointment, possessiveness, anger and so on during the course of a relationship. This is part of our human nature. The problem is that no-one has ever shown us how to deal with these things effectively. Our way of dealing with difficulties often makes things worse. We refuse to take responsibility for our part of the story. We blame the other person. We rationalize our mistakes. We don't want to be seen as being in the wrong.

Many people approach love with unrealistic ideas and expectations. When difficulties arise in a relationship, your conditioning is to see them as problems. You think something is going wrong. So you start to wonder – whose fault is this? Who screwed up? Apart from yourself, there is only one other person in the room at that moment. It is quite clear – in your mind – that the difficulty really has nothing to do with you. Like an astute detective, through a process of elimination, you point your finger at the guilty party. It's an open and shut case. There's the culprit standing right in front of you!

To your dismay, the culprit refuses to take the blame. They get defensive. They even come back at you with some finger-pointing of their own. You have entered the blame-game. This game can be played out in a heated, overt way – or in an unspoken, internalized way. Either way, it undermines the positive regard and trust necessary for a relationship to flourish. In this book, we will look at how to deal with relationship difficulties effectively. We will see that difficulties are not a problem – they are actually one of the reasons why you have come together.

Why do we enter into a relationship with another person? On one level, we do so for companionship, mutual support and the sharing of life's joys and challenges. Yet there is a deeper reason that we don't often recognize. We are there to learn how to love. The reason we don't recognize this is that we imagine we already know how to love.

This idea that we already know how to love, is what causes most relationships to break down. It is the root cause of the blame-game. After all, if I already know how to love, how could I be responsible for love disappearing? So we blame the other person for the difficulties in our relationship. And we remain blind to our share of the responsibility. You will never learn something if you can't admit that right now you are not skilled at it.

Of course, some forms of unskillfulness are easier to admit to than others. We don't mind admitting that we can't build a web-site. But admitting that we don't know how to love? That goes right to the core of who we are as human beings. Even admitting it to ourselves can be devastatingly humbling.

We spare ourselves this humiliation by recalling those times when we did experience and share love. It is true that most of us have known love at some time or other. Does this mean we have reached our full potential as lovers? Can we say that we are satisfied with what we have known? Is it enough? If you are honest with yourself, you will recognize that it is not. There is a longing in every human heart for a love that is on-going. And when we look at the reality of our situation right now, we see that this longing often remains unfulfilled.

This doesn't mean that you have to leave the relationship you are in. If there are difficulties in your relationship right now – that's perfect! This relationship can become your classroom, and the difficulties your homework assignments. It would be very helpful if your partner could join you in the classroom, but even if they are unwilling to, you can still take the opportunity to work on your own issues. Just you getting clearer within yourself will change the dynamics of the relationship.

You will find that once you have taken a couple of semesters, love starts to become more of a reality in your life. Love is not only for the lucky – it is for the honest and the sincere. It is for those who are willing to learn.

There is an assumption at the heart of this book. The assumption is – that relationships are meant to be challenging. This goes against the whole Hollywood /fairytale/ romantic/ Mills & Boon mythology of relationships that we have been brought up with. We think relationships are about sharing a love that is openly and constantly flowing. And when things don't work out this way – something has gone wrong.

The reality is – nothing has gone wrong. We are in a relationship to experience those parts of ourselves that interfere with the free flow of love – and to transform them. We are there to learn. None of us is perfectly loving. As human beings, we are all on a journey to reach our full potential. And in a relationship, our full potential is to love openly and freely. In a relationship, we are each other's teachers and students. A teacher doesn't blame the student for making a mistake. A teacher is empathetic and encouraging. The teacher thinks 'How can I make this more clear?' That's how we should be with our partner when we see them being less than perfect. And when we make a mistake, we should be willing to admit it – at least to ourselves.

When these things are understood, amazing things will happen. The whole dynamic of your relationship will change. Rather than all the blaming and finger-pointing, there will be the excitement of mutual discovery and growth. You will support each other in reaching your full potential, taking delight in your breakthroughs and achievements along the way.

The questions for you will become 'What relationship curriculum do I want to follow?' 'How can I best reach my full potential?'

In this book, a set of guidelines is given that covers almost every aspect of intimate relationships. Money, sexuality, possessiveness, jealousy, control, assertiveness, honesty, vulnerability, judgments, attachment are just some of the issues we will explore in detail. These are the main places where people get stuck. Love may be there – but possessiveness can stifle and destroy it. Excessive control or judgment can destroy it. Yet we will find that at some time or other, one or more of these issues will plague our relationship. If we can meet the challenge of dealing with an issue head-on, we can transform it. It will no longer be the stumbling block that causes our relationship to flounder.

This is one of the main purposes of relationships – to transform ourselves into loving beings. We won't discover our possessiveness or judgments out on the golf course, or sitting on a meditation cushion. We discover them in the nitty gritty of an intimate relationship. The message of this book is – this discovery is an essential part of reaching your full potential. How you can use this discovery for your own benefit is what this book is about. In addition to learning how to transform and overcome your negative tendencies, we will also explore those qualities that will enhance your relationship. Maximizing sexual bliss, improving communication skills, developing trust and honesty, cultivating forgiveness and gratitude, balancing control with spontaneity are some of the positive qualities that, when you cultivate them, will greatly improve your relationship.

All of this takes time. We won't achieve these things overnight. However, on this journey, our joy comes not from reaching some goal, but from traveling the path. The discoveries and breakthroughs we make on the way, and the ever-deepening connection we feel evolving, are what make the journey worthwhile. I still consider myself a learner on the path of love. I have not discovered an end point to it, although I have been traveling it for many years. At first, I was filled with romantic ideas about love. I believed that you fell in love, and the feeling would last forever. So I was surprised to discover my girlfriend having bad moods, and myself becoming disappointed in her. I was also surprised at our arguments, and the stubbornness with which both of us refused to yield. Bit by bit, my romantic illusions were swept aside by the reality of two people struggling with different aspects of their natures. Since then I have been in several significant relationships. It was not till I met my first spiritual teacher that I started to explore the ups and downs of my relationships in a conscious way.

I started to pay attention to my old habits of wanting to be in control. I discovered a possessive side to myself. I became aware of my judgments. At the same time, I started to notice what effect these things had on myself and on my partner. Whenever I was judging her, I noticed her getting defensive, and feeling offended. It didn't matter whether I was right or not, she was not willing to listen to me at that moment.

With the guidance of my spiritual teacher, I started to adjust my attitudes and behavior.

I started to let go of the attempts at control. I learned to respect my partner's freedom, and at the same time, not allow my own freedom to be interfered with. I gave up 'trying' to create a loving connection, and learned to just let it happen. Over time, these and other lessons started to sink in – and my relationships changed dramatically. Gone were the hassles, the tension, and the insecurity. In their place a mutual positive regard arose – and a lot of love.

The ideas in this book have come, not from academic study, but from my own struggles to find love, and from my work as a counselor, therapist and meditation teacher. Dealing with many different relationship issues with a wide variety of people has deepened my understanding of what works and what doesn't work in a relationship.

I have used the model of the seven chakras as a way of giving some order and clarity to the various difficulties we deal with in relationships. The Tantric Yoga chakra system mirrors very closely the most common issues that confront couples. Money, sexuality, jealousy, possessiveness, power and control, love and intimacy are the main issues we face in a relationship. They are also what the energies of the first four chakras are all about. The chakra system is explained in more detail in Chapter Two.

For the purposes of this book, which is to provide guidelines for finding love in an intimate relationship, we will follow the model of the chakras up till the fourth chakra. This is the heart centre, and is where the journey to find love comes to fulfillment.

It is my intention to follow this book with a second book, to describe the journey of the last three chakras. In that book, we will look beyond the dynamics of a one-to-one relationship, to our connection with life and the universe. We will find that the skills we learn in an intimate relationship greatly improve our connection to all of life, including our spirituality.

For now, it is my sincere wish that what is written here may benefit you on your journey to realizing all the potential you have for sharing love with another.