

All Souls Church Unitarian Covenant Group Guide, June 2014: Love

Readings on Love

In brief

Love is the condition in which the happiness of another is essential to your own.

Robert Heinlein

Lord, grant that I might not so much seek to be loved as to love.

St. Francis of Assisi

The most important thing in life is to learn to give out love and to let it come in.

Morrie Schwartz

Love me when I least deserve it because that's when I really need it.

Swedish proverb

Metaphors for Life

Writing teacher Richard Norquist has compiled a list of 99 metaphors for love. Here are two from his list. (See 97 others at About.com/od/rhetoricstyle/a/lovemetaphors.htm).

Love needs new leaves every summer of life, as much as your elm-trees, and new branches to grow broader and wider, and new flowers at the root to cover the ground.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Chimney Corner*, 1868

Real love is a pilgrimage. It happens when there is no strategy, but it is very rare because most people are strategists.

Anita Brookner, 1989 interview

No Greater Love, A Teaching Story

I will never forget one day in Venezuela when I went to visit a family who had given us a lamb. I went to thank them and there I found out that they had a badly crippled child. I asked the mother, "What is the child's name?" The mother gave me a most beautiful answer. "We call him 'Teacher of Love,' because he keeps on teaching us how to love. Everything we do for him is our love for God in action."

Mother Teresa: *No Greater Love*, edited by Becky Benenate and Joseph Durepos

Love and Justice

The ultimate criterion of justice, as of everything else in human life, is the divine imperative — the law of love ... Justice is the institutionalization of love in society ... This law of love requires that every man be treated as a Thou, a person, an end in himself, never merely as a thing or a means to another's end. When this demand is translated into laws and institutions under the conditions of human life in history, justice arises.

Will Herberg, Jewish theologian

Gospel of Luke

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

King James Version 6:32-35

Love and Attention

To love means to nourish the other with appropriate attention. When you practice Right Mindfulness, you make yourself and the other person present at the same time. “Darling, I know that you are there. Your presence is precious to me.”

Thich Nhat Hahn

The Love Tank

I liked the metaphor the first time I heard it: “Inside every child is an ‘emotional tank’ waiting to be filled with love. When a child really feels loved, he will develop normally, but when the love tank is empty, the child will misbehave. Much of the misbehavior of children is motivated by the cravings of an empty ‘love tank.’” I was listening to Dr. Ross Campbell, a psychiatrist who has treated hundreds of children and adolescents.

As I listened, I thought of the hundreds of parents who had paraded the misdeeds of their children through my office. I had never visualized an empty love tank inside those children, but I had certainly seen the results of it. Their misbehavior was a misguided search for the love they did not feel. They were seeking love in all the wrong places and in all the wrong ways.

I also realized that many of their parents were suffering from an empty love tank and that much of the misbehavior of married individuals was growing out of an empty love tank.

Gary Chapman

Chapman has written extensively about “the five emotional love languages.” In his view, we speak a primary love language but the people we love need to be loved in their own preferred language-- words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, or physical touch. He helps parents and spouses communicate love more effectively.

Love

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.

Then he wants to use himself and things
So that they stand in the glow of ripeness.
It doesn't matter whether he knows what he serves:
Who serves best doesn't always understand.

Czeslaw Milosz

Loving Self, Loving Life

Those who don't love themselves as they are rarely love life as it is either. Most people have come to prefer certain of life's experiences and deny and reject others, unaware of the value of the hidden things that may come wrapped in plain or even ugly paper. In avoiding all pain and seeking comfort at all cost, we may be left without intimacy or compassion; in rejecting change and risk we often cheat ourselves of the quest; in denying our suffering we may never know our strength or our greatness. Or even that the love we have been given can be trusted. It is natural, even instinctive to prefer comfort to pain, the familiar to the unknown. But sometimes our instincts are not wise. Life usually offers us far more than our biases and preferences will allow us to have. Beyond comfort lie grace, mystery, and adventure. We may need to let go of our beliefs and ideas about life in order to have life.

Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Are there teachers of love in your life in the sense that Mother Teresa refers to?
2. Do you have a personal definition of love? Is it a single definition or do love of God, familial love, romantic love, love between friends require different definitions?
3. Do you know what your own personal emotional language of love is in the sense that Gary Chapman talks about? Is it the same language for loving and being loved? Does this idea suggest opportunities to behave differently?
4. Is your "love tank" generally full? Are you surrounded by people with relatively full tanks? Do particular gestures come to mind where you communicated love most beautifully or gestures that caused you to feel particularly loved or cherished?
5. How does All Souls inform your understanding of love and contribute to your loving? Are there any particular songs that you've heard at All Souls that cause you to "feel" love?

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