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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



This Thing Called Love by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

*The conclusion is always the same:
Love is the most powerful and still the most
Unknown energy of the world.*
— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin



“What is a healthy love relationship?” the hungry heart asks. “Is love a poetic Valentine’s Day card, a love song that tugs at the heart, or a never-ending supply of romance, candy, wine, and red roses?” These symbols of romantic love are delicious and wonderful, but they are not the same as the true love *experience* that takes practice, and courage, and builds a foundation of emotional intimacy.

“Some couples are spending time together when, in reality, they are only living in close proximity.”
— Gary Chapman

What does it really mean, this thing called love? Is it defined by Hallmark cards, or by the ache of the heart? Why are we seemingly struggling, searching, or longing for a soul mate to make us feel complete? Too often the romantic symbols turn out to be illusions, replaced by the pain of a growing awareness of unmet emotional needs and empty commitments that can destroy even the “tightest” of love relationships. Perhaps these contradictory feelings have shown up in your own love relationships.

Janet needed to feel needed but didn’t know she had a right to be loved. She was great at duty; but is that love? Unconscious expectations, like the desire to belong, to be cared for or protected, need to be identified and verbalized. When we keep giving *without expectation* to a partner who feels *entitled*, it’s not love! I call that being a doormat

Janet, a client who recently separated from her chronically out-of-work spouse. She had been “carrying” him financially for ten years, not an uncommon phenomenon among women who are hungry for love and feel that helping a partner through “tough financial times” is part of what love is all about. Romance, of course, is what drew Janet in; Eros shot his arrow directly at her heart and “from the get-go” she willingly took on the financial responsibility in the relationship. “I even let him handle the finances because it made me feel *as if* he was really taking care of me, even though I was totally supporting him. He became the child I longed for.” Over time, Janet’s love turned to resentment and anger, and ultimately verbal abuse as she recognized that she was being taken advantage of. She was getting crumbs, empty promises and occasional lip-smacking kisses. Wanting more, yet feeling guilty for asking, she shed many tears over the realization that what she thought was love had turned into *duty* on her part, and a sense of *entitlement* on his part. “He had no intension of working. He felt he was too good to go out and get a job. When I read an article about *co-dependency*, I thought, “That’s me!” Up until then, I figured the situation was just something I had to live with, but once I saw that my great love story was just an illusion, I knew I could no longer put up with it.”

Janet stated, “We were like 2 ships passing in the night. I no longer wanted to suffer the loneliness and emotional abandonment I’d been feeling for the last ten-years.” Unconsciously, Janet had been relying on her husband to fulfill her unmet need for care and protection. “I kept him safe in a pumpkin shell hoping he would love me.” But that didn’t happen. Instead, her marriage turned into a one-way street.

When love is a mysterious quantity, dreamed of but never felt, it breeds a *longing* for it. Mutual attraction of partners is further based on similar needs and fears. Each partner unconsciously attempts to overcome past trauma and conflict in their adult relationship dynamics. In Janet’s situation, wanting to feel taken care financially and emotionally was her unmet childhood need, so she *became* what she wanted most for herself — a nurturing caregiver. Anxiety about the needs of others had always been translated into meeting the needs of others, which left her unable to identify her own needs. Her strength and her commitment to external goals and achievements only reinforced the very walls she hoped love would chip away at.

Is it time to work through your own conflicting feelings, to begin your own inner journey which psychologist Carl Jung called, "the transformative journey?" Finding a *self*, inside, reinvesting the nurturing energy, manifesting your own buried gold, is a draw for a healthy relationship

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