

BEHOLD: THE POWER OF LOVE

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To love is to behold; to fall fully open to the amazing wonders of another human soul. There is no magic more beautiful and powerful than that energy which transforms us in the presence of a beloved other. Is it magic or divinity? I'm convinced it must be divine: how else could the survival of our species be so elegantly ensured?

Just consider love's many dimensions. On a biological level, the very survival of our species depends on love. This single, powerful energy is at the heart of every basic need: from nurturance and protection through procreation. Biologists maintain that love is not only what defines us humanly, but that it is the very agent of both our individual growth and collective evolution. Imagine: our cellular structures and neural pathways are literally altered through the agency of love, as we open ourselves to receive another human environment into our own.

Amazing!

On a social level, people who love and feel emotionally connected to others actually live longer and are more resilient to despair and disease than those who are alone or detached. Love somehow fortifies our immune systems, helps our bodies heal, and inoculates us against disease.

On an individual level, love can inspire us to grow beyond ourselves. Miraculously, love holds the potential to heal emotional wounds and move us beyond our fears and limitations. It opens us to look through eyes of wonder or see through the eyes of another human soul.

On a spiritual level, love enables us to transcend our temporal and material world. It is as if in our last moments the meaning of life becomes suddenly clear: loving, and feeling loved, is the energy that drives everything else and that links us to the divine.

What *is* this elusive phenomenon that defies definition but without which we could not endure? I'm drawn to the words of the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh: "To love means to listen," he teaches. "The capacity of listening to ourselves is the foundation of the capacity of listening to others." This capacity to truly *listen*; to wholly perceive and experience another human being, comes exclusively through the act of loving. It is the power to behold. And, it begins with learning to behold and accept ourselves.

[Insert Sidebar 2 about here] In my experience working with couples I know this to be true. The more I listen, the more I hear this basic need expressed: "Know me. Understand me. Respect my differences and accept my weaknesses. Love who I am, not who you need me to be. If I can feel this from you, then I will feel safe and free to give you all that I have to give." Behold me. It is at once a primary need and the highest expression of love. To love someone freely and without design allows you to see into their true nature and internal goodness. When this happens – when couples risk receiving each other "as is", grace begins. The fight to defend who they are evaporates. Kindness becomes contagious and being gracious supplants being right. Forgiveness becomes a gift to the relationship rather than a begrudging act of sacrifice. To feel loved and known releases our highest potential.

Love passes through many phases and by definition is never perfect. Or, I should say, love becomes perfect only when we abandon the pursuit of perfection and instead embrace the beauty in our human flaws. This is the wonderful secret they never advertise: that happiness doesn't come from being or creating the perfect person. It comes from discovering the intrinsic perfection when you're with the person you love. **[Insert Sidebar 3 about here]** We may never understand what draws any two human souls together, but we know this to be true: something magical occurs between two people when they fall in love. It creates a force field so strong and persistent that life's greatest struggles, tragedies –even wars- have been surmounted when fueled by love's energy and promise alone. I wish I could tell you how this happens. I only know that

love is hatched and not designed, and that when it happens, the love of another can engender the strength necessary to survive whatever challenges a lifetime presents.

But finding love is even less about finding the right person than it is about *being* the right person: it's about being someone who can replace the misdirected needs to control or possess, with the safety and serenity found in loving for its own sake. It's about being willing to behold the delightful "who" rather than the coveted "what." And then, miraculously, it's about discovering the capacity to surrender. Letting go allows us to let in. When we surrender to the vast promise of truly loving another, our lives achieve meaning and direction. We open ourselves to the dual possibilities of growth (being changed by another), and true internal peace (accepting our human flaws). And with surrender, we open ourselves to a kind of passion that results only from having achieved a trusting sense of abandon. **[Insert Sidebar 4 about here]**

I was once a professional violinist. I've played on many violins, and they all respond differently. The key, I've discovered, to releasing their most beautiful sound is to know your instrument so well, so intrinsically, that you simply understand what it responds to and what it doesn't: which strings need tenderness and which withstand force; how fast or hard to draw the bow; how to release a whisper and how to unleash passion. How one violin responds won't necessarily be like any other. Each has its own personality and all your willpower or finesse can't convince it otherwise. The secret, I've discovered, is to work *with* rather than *against* the limits of your instrument, and not try to force the music out of it. Only then will it give forth its most glorious song.

People respond the same way. Their beauty needs to be released, not extracted, and the only way to know how your lover responds is to listen carefully and behold their true nature. Love is the agency that allows us to do just that: to see into the interiors of our beloved and to cherish rather than judge what we observe. Love enables us to see past our own eyes, know past our own experiences, disinhabit our bodies and minds in order to bear witness to the beauty of

another human soul. Only with loving eyes can you truly see what your partner needs and responds to, and are you less likely to create obstacles for them to surmount in response to you.

Invite them to love you by making it easy. Release them from their defenses: know them so well that you understand how to dissolve their fear, anger, and pride in your presence. Love with abandon and generosity, and then behold, the power of love.

SIDEBARS

1. To love is to behold; to fall fully open to the amazing wonders of another human soul.
2. Love who I am, not who you need me to be. If I can feel this from you, then I will feel safe and free to give you all that I have to give.
3. This is the wonderful secret they never advertise: that happiness doesn't come from being or creating the perfect person. It comes from discovering the intrinsic perfection when you're with the person you love.
4. With surrender we open ourselves to a kind of passion that results only from having achieved a trusting sense of abandon.
5. "Upon what instrument have we been strung?
And in the hands of what musician are we held?"
R. M. Rilke, "Love Song"
6. Invite them to love you by making it easy. Release them from their defenses: know them so well that you understand how to dissolve their fear, anger, and pride in your presence.

