

COMMUNITY

What is love to most of us?



HOMEFRONT
CONSTANCE
JOHANNESSEN

I awoke this morning to a speaker on NHPR who was describing Americans as people who work excessively and consequently are lonely. He went on to say people were hungry for connections.

If we are hungry for connection, it is safe to bet that many people are starving for love. Our media tend to stupefy love to superficial romance and sex. Yet to truly love someone means intimacy and depth of emotion. As we all know, love is one of the most intense human experiences we need and crave.

Recently, I attended a small house wedding. The young bride and groom initiated the

SONG OF LOVE

Love is little, love is low
Love will make our spirit grow
Grow in peace, grow in light
Love will do the thing that's right.

Shaker song, 1834

singing of the above Shaker song; 'love is little ... love will do the thing that's right'. As people sang, I scanned the room. Some had tears flowing down their faces. I wondered: Were they tears from their own commitment of love? Tears of love lost? Or, were they moved by the bride and groom's relationship?

In a glance, I wondered what was love like for the folks around me?

Some couples were young and appeared to be soul mates. They naturally embraced each other. You could feel their intense connection and spark. They seemed to be falling in love. There were also couples who had moved beyond the stage of falling in love and were in long-term relationships. These couples appeared to be in two separate categories. The first seemed similar to what the patriarch in "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" called "Dry." They tended to lack excitement, newness, or nurturance. Yet if asked, they most likely would claim they love each other. The second group sang quite loud and found joy in their partner. They still had

a spark. They too would likely confirm love for each other.

What is love to most of us? Loving someone means giving your heart, mind and soul to the relationship. It means sharing one of life's most precious gifts: time. It often means having a heavy heart when your partner is in pain and working to shore them up. Loving someone means more than liking how they physically appear. It is connecting with their essence, accepting their vulnerabilities and being there when they need you.

How does love affect us physically? Anthropologist Helen Fisher researched why people experienced mood swings, sleeplessness and obsession when falling in love and concluded it was such a powerful force that "is a need and human

drive." Psychologist Stephanie Ortigue in her research on "the Neuroimaging of Love," determined that when couples fall in love there are 12 areas of the brain that are positively tapped and affect the intellect, as well as inducing euphoria.

In contrast to couples who were falling in love, older couples who survived the test of time have lower blood pressure. In Brooks Gump's studies on intimacy she determined that intimacy is good for your heart. This research indicated it did not matter if the relationship was fulfilling or "dry." And, so love whether new or old is good for the soul as well as physically.

In many areas of our lives when things do not go right, starting over or moving on is the choice: changing jobs, homes, etc. Sometimes couples

apply this mindset to their relationship. Often I will tell couples when counseling them, "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater." If you love your partner, but during that particular moment can't stand him or her, change may mean doing work together to get on track. This may mean learning to communicate, addressing conflict constructively and using anger to create change. Holding on to love is not always easy, yet falling in love and growing in love is key to life's fulfillment.

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