

The Art and Seven Skills of Love

Offered by Ilene Dillon, MSW

“What the world needs now is love, sweet love....” The words of this song say it all. We are all in need of love. Our world is in need of love. The love we need involves caring for people (including ourselves) just as they are, getting to know and appreciate one another, intimacy, giving and receiving, respecting ourselves and others and making the commitment to love. Though easy to say and to list, it is more difficult to create, find and express this kind of love because doing those things requires knowledge, work, and dedication. And since for all human beings their initial understanding about all the aspects of human life are learned in the earliest years of life, it falls to parents to teach and offer and share this love. On parents everywhere falls the solemn and joyful responsibility of creating the “love, sweet love” that our world needs now.

“Love” is viewed by most people, not as an emotion, but as a “state of being.” Accepted as something that just “is” a part of every person’s original makeup, the idea of identifying the components or “skills” of love is unfamiliar to most of us. Some, in fact, would consider viewing and teaching love as a skill, with component parts that need to be learned and practiced, destroys the essence of that love. How can we break love down into skills, when love just “is?”

“Love” is THE vital ingredient in the lives of every human on the earth. Love of self is necessary for positive self-esteem and personal growth. Love of children is necessary for their successful maturation, even their survival. (Studies have shown that children institutionalized in orphanages who are deprived of loving touch actually die.) People who love what they do for a living have greater success. A “loveless person” is an empty person. People who exchange love with others, even domesticated animals, live longer and more happily.

Love, in the many ways we understand and know it, is part of every aspect of human lives. Yet, we hold images of love which relate mostly to “romance,” and expect ourselves and others to recognize love immediately when we see it, usually looking for love outside of ourselves. Divorce statistics in the industrialized world attest to the fact that many, many people do not, in fact, hold inside of themselves or recognize the real love we claim to seek. Fortunately, learning and practicing Skills of Love can increase love in us, and improve our lives.

What Is Love?

Love is both a state of being (feminine) and an action (masculine). It is an art and a skill. Love is the act of loving, an art which blooms, as well as skills that can be mastered. Love exists inside each of us, is shared within all kinds of relationships, and is as real and vital in friendships and families as it is between lovers. Whether love is for our self, others, for animals or for things, it remains constant: it is still “love.” Since love is a form that energy takes, it does best when it is moved from person to person, necessitating we learn to both give and receive love.

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Love as a Real Emotion

Love is an emotion, real in that it has both positive and negative aspects. Love becomes negative when it is forced upon us, usually in a manipulative way, with an expectation that the person loved will automatically “love back.” Love is positive when it is given and received freely, without expectation, creating the experience of caring, learning, respect, intimacy, commitment and sharing which we have come to associate with the act of loving.

Interestingly, love is best found “in here,” rather than “out there.” Because all of life is lived from the inside out, it’s what we have inside of us that matters. This means allowing ourselves to know ourselves as lovable, to nurture self-love, and to allow ourselves love and be loved. Because what we have inside of us is mirrored back to us by others, the best way to “find” love for ourselves is to give it to, and develop it in, our own selves.

The Seven Skills of Love

You can become a “master” at loving by learning the individual skills and components and interweaving them into the fabric of your life in the “ultimate performance of” a human life. A beautiful ballet that results from hours and hours of practicing individual movements is not always evident at the time of learning and practicing. So, too, the fullness of love may not always be visible as you learn and practice the individual components. If you dedicate yourself to the learning and practice of love with the fervor of a dancer, the “dance of love” in your life can become full and satisfying. Because a loving person utilizes the skills of love and is characterized by loving behaviors, as you learn and practice these seven skills, your feelings of love will automatically increase. That love will also be reflected back to you.

1. Honest caring involves all the caring one person would do for another when that person’s life, security, comfort, trust and happiness really matter. It involves concern for health and safety, emotions, how a person is treated, how life is being lived and what happens to that person. One of the most difficult and important aspects of honest caring is that of “acceptance,” discovering “how I am” and accepting that it is “me,” without judgment or rejection. Since life is lived from the inside out, the more accepting we can be of our own self, the more we will become truly accepting of others. That acceptance, too, will be reflected back to us.

2. Responsibility involves learning and accepting that each person bears responsibility, ultimately, for our own life, for our impact upon others, choices, mistakes and actions, as well as the people we draw to ourselves. Responsibility in loving is tricky, in that it involves taking responsibility *alongside* others but not *for* them. One of the ways to protect this ability in yourself is to be certain to ask others *if they want your help*, before giving help. Any answer that is not a clear “yes” is to be counted as a “no,” and the help is not to be given. Observe what happens if you don’t follow this protocol!

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3. Knowing and learning about self and others—showing a constant interest in learning all that we do not know (without adding our assumptions) about those with whom we relate, including our own self. Develop an attitude of being a “constant, unassuming learner”.

4. Respect accepting others *exactly as they are*, without wanting to change “a hair on their head.” This can only be done by being *real* in your respect for others, while they remain the person they are. The most difficult aspect of respect is respecting someone you don’t like. Respect that person for who s/he is. Remember that it’s not necessary to like that person. We can choose not to spend time with them. All we need to do is allow them, respectfully, to be who they are. It’s like allowing a sunflower to be a sunflower, rather than demand it become a rose!

5. Being intimate is a part of wanting to know and learn about the people we love, practiced in an intense and spontaneous manner. Intimacy and love are often confused. They do overlap in the skills utilized (e.g., both involve truly caring and trust); yet a person can be intimate without being loving. Do everything you can to keep your openness to intimacy thriving. To do this, you’ll also need to develop character (live according to your own ideals and principles), because intimacy involves vulnerability and trust, two qualities that can be decimated all too easily. Once you develop character, you’re your own person, and can’t be upset very easily.

6. Commitment is a more intense and total form of taking responsibility. This is what most of us seek when we marry another person—an assurance that the other person is serious about their commitment to go through life with us. Even if you end up needing to have a “70/30” relationship, with you doing most of the giving, are you still committed? Knowing ourselves, and what we can and cannot live with, is key in deciding to make commitment, and in maintaining it. Each of us has “non-negotiables” and need to stay true to ourselves in order for commitment to work.

7. Giving is best done **after** all the other skills are in practice, not before. When something is truly given, the giver has no concern about what is done with the gift. Giving can be tangible and intangible, and includes such “gifts” as time, attention, sharing, beauty, creativity, thought, caring, concern, help, touch, conversation and thoughtfulness. Most of us are tempted to start giving at the very beginning of long-term relationships. Giving is more deeply motivated if we take the time to put the other Skills of love into place before we start giving!

Things to Remember

There are three things to remember and keep in perspective regarding love. Developing your understanding of their influence on love, and developing alternatives that allow us to still be human while engaging in a larger field of energy, is very important. These things are:

- Judgment
- Attachment
- Resistance

Judgment

You will note that in this writing we have mentioned “without judgment” many times. Most of us are harsh judges of our own selves, which of course gets spread out over those around us and mirrored back to us.

One definition given for “judgment” is “the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions.” The difficulty we encounter is that these decisions and conclusions are based on “available evidence.” What happens when we don’t have full information? Is it even possible to have full information?

And what happens when we focus judgment on ourself? Again, one definition of “self-judgment” tell us it “results from thoughts individuals have about themselves and the meanings attached to those thoughts. The thoughts, hence, produce related feelings such as anxiety, anger, and depression.” (Isn’t it a sad thought that when we focus judgment—considered decisions or sensible conclusions—onto ourselves, the results are anxiety, anger and depression? This really is the result of not loving ourselves.)

It *is* important that we make distinctions, but because we humans are limited in what we know, we need a better way to make distinctions. We need *discernment*. Dictionary.com says discernment is the faculty of discerning; discrimination; acuteness of judgment and understanding. With discernment, we notice differences, see inconsistencies, and allow ourselves to feel how we feel about people or situations. But we don’t *judge*. We don’t draw conclusions. Love exists more completely when we are discerning.

Attachment

So much of what we struggle with in life results from a person having an attachment to particular outcomes and experiences. Combined with our limited ability to see all the factors, this attachment sets us up to have expectations regarding those outcomes. When they don’t occur—or sometimes even when they occur differently that we expect—we experience emotions like disappointment or depression. Without realizing it, we set ourselves up to be miserable and to have difficulties. Do you need to continue doing this in your own life?

If not, instead of *attachment*, consider utilizing *presence*. Presence is more like being a witness to what is happening, holding ourselves in a state of interest and curiosity about what will occur. Instead of determining what we want to happen and attaching to that, we “let go and let God,” as the saying goes. We allow things to unfold, rather than making any attempt to control them.

We *can* work with intention at such times, however. We can identify what we’d really like to have happen, state that out loud, and then ask “If it is right for me, this is the outcome I’d really like. It’s what I *intend* for myself if it is right for me. Please help me.” Then, however, we need to move on with life and not focus on any particular outcome. In the business of “finding love,” we can identify what we want, when, how we want it to

happen, but *then* we need to turn it loose and allow what is best for us to occur. We need to continue to live in present time, being *present* (observing and curious), but not attached. Amazing things can happen when we let go of attachment. Identify what you want, then release attachment to the outcome. Instead, allow energy to flow freely.

Resistance

Resistance leads to most of our difficulties in life. It is much more pervasive in our personal lives than most of us realize.

We resist emotions: we don't let them come up in us, refuse to look at them or partner to work with them, resist their message, and attempt to push them away. Since emotions are energy, they are busy growing in power inside of us, even as we are attempting to contain them. When they've grown strong enough, they can burst forth from us and create problems. Just think of the last time you felt angry about something, attempted to hold onto that anger, and then experienced it bursting out of you, usually creating a crisis in relationships or in our lives.

We resist change: most people resist change so strongly that once they have realized that change needs to be made, they wait until the pain of where they are gets so great, they figure it couldn't be any worse if they made the change. As a psychotherapist, I have seen this happen hundreds of times. This is another way in which we create our own pain. Consider love relationships you've been in, knew they weren't really right for you, yet *resisted* turning loose, usually out of fear of never getting better. Making change as soon as you realize it needs to be made, on the other hand, offers immediate release, and is usually followed by things or people coming into our life that are better than we could ever have imagined!

We resist closeness: like not taking the risk to be fully who we are, not sharing how we really feel, not doing new things, not revealing that we don't know something, and not speaking up to set boundaries for ourselves. This list can go on and on

What is there instead of *resistance*? Surrender. What happens if we *Surrender to Love*? What if you knew something much larger than you had your back—all the time? Would you take more risks, be more confident, abandon fear, and allow yourself to be more of who you are? Consider that *Love*, being the "stuff" of the universe, is there to do just this!

Not only will *Love* do this for you, but it offers to do the same for all of us. Because we are energy beings, we are not separate from one another. We are One. Thus, if you allow yourself to be confident that *Love* has your back, that confidence spreads—like the ripples caused by a rock thrown into a still pond—through everyone, everywhere! Imagine if a third or half of all humans lived their lives knowing that *Love* has their back, thus living fuller, more courageous, fear-less, and non-resistant lives? Every person who does this adds to the ripple effect.

Now, imagine living your life as though *Love* has your back. While you're out in the world, living full of love, taking chances and being yourself, you need a person who is also living as though *Love* has his or her back. This occurs *because of the Law of Attraction*, which tells us that what we have inside of us, we tend to attract from outside of us. Can you just imagine the kind of love, relationship and experiences you and this person will be able to attract and share together when you both know *Love* has your back?

NOW you have "found love!"

Notice that you "found" it inside of yourself, by deciding to live as though *Love* has your back, being your full self and sharing your full self with the world.

Enjoy the ripples.

Ilene L. Dillon, M.S.W., aka "The Emotional Pro," is showing the world how to develop Emotional Mastery for Life. Her book, *Emotions in Motion: Mastering Life's Built-in Navigation System*, was released in 2019. She has been transforming the world by spreading the word about the power and mastery of human emotions for five decades.

A long-time California Marriage and Family Therapist, Ilene helps people to understand why we have emotions, what they are intended to do for us, how to work masterfully with them, so that you are the Master of your emotions, rather than allowing emotions to dictate life to you. Ilene is a pioneer of the Emotional Literacy field, having published her first books in 1994. She now teaches, mentors and writes about emotions, serving all who want to develop powerful and amazing lives by bypassing emotional "management" and going directly to Emotional Mastery.

Ilene has become a "full time RV-er," traveling and working, full time, in her 24 foot RV. She may be coming by where you live and work. If you want to hear Ilene speak, or have her create a workshop for your group, contact her to find out when she'll be coming your way.

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