

Unconditional Love

Today I am speaking on Love...and unconditional love. We all think we understand the concept of love. We are going to explore that concept, then we are going to go deeper into a discussion of unconditional love.

Our concept of love starts early in life. There is a love for mother, then father, brother & sister. We may love a pet or a favourite toy or possession. Generally our concept for love doesn't go much further than extended family until we are older.

At some point we recognize a longing to share with someone else. That is usually a romantic love, which is new territory on the map of love. Pre-pubescents considered the opposite sex to have "cutties". Then suddenly there is an unexpected attraction that changes everything.

At this point we are dealing with a new type of love that is all consuming, at times. There is a desire to be with that person and to be loved back by that person that borders on "neediness".

In rather short order we expand our concept of love to include someone we want to share everything with

Often the next expansion of the concept of love comes with children. This is different from romantic love, but a very powerful connection develops between a parent and a child.

At this point we are on the cusp of experiencing unconditional love probably for the first time. A child can have bad behaviour. They can disappoint and cause emotional hurt. However, you still hold on to the love a parent has for their child.

That is as far as it goes for most people. Yet others continue to experience growth in their concept of love. Some are inspired by beauty; they may love the majestic mountains, colors in the sunset, or the sounds of music. A few find they can expand

their concept of love to include their community or their band of brothers in a common endeavour.

When we look back over our lives we can usually recollect key moments when we realized we were in love or had feeling intense love. These were very positive experiences that greatly enhance our lives. When you feel love for someone or loved by someone, you experience one of the emotional highs of life.

We all want to feel loveand to feel loved.

Well, if love is such a good thing, then why is unconditional love so difficult?

Unconditional love is not a light topic.

Our culture does not readily accept givers of unconditional love

One notable man preaching unconditional love was nailed to a tree and a religion was created around him. Jesus Christ's story does have powerful lessons for us. His philosophy helped shape much of the values of the western civilization. His was the first widely accepted message on UL

We hold his life story up as an example to live by. We celebrate his birth each Christmas.

The Dalai Lama also speaks of UL and compassion. He has inspired millions and yet is reviled at the same time by others.

I want to talk some about unconditional love. I am not suggesting that everyone start living immediately by a code of UL, but to explore moments when we might use UL as a tool for coping with the challenges we have in life.

We all know how love enhances our lives. We can easily imagine that more love in the world would be a very good thing. I want to explore ways that you can use UL to improve the quality of your life, while making the world a better place, too.

Let's see what happens when we express UL

If you go back to your early days of recognizing the development of love in your life, you can see how it made you vulnerable, at times. Think of an early romantic love. Did you ever experience jealousy? Were you ever hurt by someone you loved? You loved them, but they did not love you back, as you wished?

Everyone has had these experiences growing up. Sometimes the pain from unrequited love causes people to put up high emotional fences. They might back away from any chance of loving someone again for fear of being hurt again.

Now let's explore what unconditional love would mean in this situation.

A young man is in love with a young woman.

One day he notices she does not have the same warm loving manner of the past. She begins to have interest in another young man.

The first response is jealousy

The second response is hurt and a feeling of abandonment

These feelings can drive one deep into despair.

At this point, if the young man can muster UL, he changes his whole outlook. He decides he loves the young woman no matter what happens or path she chooses. He tells himself that he loves her completely. He loves her enough to let her go, if that is what she wants. He recognizes he can love her even if she chooses not to be with him. He loves her and wishes for her happiness, where ever that takes her.

This is a challenge for sure. But look at what the result is.

The young man feels unbridled love for someone else.

He recognizes he can still hold on to the feeling of loving someone, even if they are gone. Loving someone is a good feeling that lifts us. While feeling the love flow

through him, as he wishes for her happiness, the jealousy evaporates away. He stops feeling that he is hurt, as wishes for and acknowledges her happiness

The leap into UL has freed him from focusing on his jealousy or hurt feelings, which have passed. It has allowed him to once again feel the high of loving another. He has grown beyond the neediness.....needing to be loved in order to feel love

Another example is how we handle frustration.

Imagine you are traveling down I-10 on your way to Baton Rouge. You are running tight on time and are in a bit of a hurry. A car is riding in the fast lane along side a truck.

There they are moseying along without a care in the world...not speeding up...not slowing down, just blocking the passing lane.

About this time you are beginning to feel some stress. You are thinking this Cretan has the intellect of a squirrel. As the moments continue to pass with them coasting along in the passing lane, you continue to get more worked up. You begin to tailgate them, maybe flash your brights, or even resort to honking. None of this is exercising the polite behaviour you pride yourself for.

Consider for a moment what this situation would be like, if you were expressing UL. They would still be blocking traffic, but you would not be so worked up. You would recognize that they are indeed intellectually impaired, but your anger and frustration are not going to change that. You might actually recognize that a little patience here is helpful. This person obviously is clueless. Let's send a little love their way and enjoy the scenery, since we can not go faster anyway.

Just by thinking about and acting on UL, the stress begins to melt away. You have not changed squirrel brain at all, but you have put yourself in a much better place. You send a blessing their way and put yourself at ease.

A third example is the person in your office or circle of contacts. This person is basically mean, petty, selfish, and a generally negative person. You do not like to be around

them. They pick on those lower in status and say cruel things about people behind their backs. This behaviour puts you off and makes you feel quite uncomfortable. This is an impossible person to love.

Now image what situation develops, if you start expressing UL. First you feel some compassion for this person. You actually pity them. They are a miserable tortured soul. They have low self esteem and probably do not have any real friends. As you work with UL, it changes your whole perspective of this person.

Now expressing UL does not change them. They may still be mean and petty. They will continue to struggle with the drama they are locked into as a negative person. They will probably react to you differently, because they are not used to anyone expressing love toward them.

The biggest change will be in you! When you express UL, you are no longer put off by them, as you were before. You recognize they are lonely and self-absorbed. They just do not know how to behave well. You no longer feel anger and loathing, you feel compassion and love. You feel better about them and yourself for seeing through their tough outer facade.

Consider exercising UL for yourself. All of us have experienced times when we were not our best. Perhaps we have regrets over our behaviour or actions. Depending on the person or the situation, this can lead to considerable guilt. Guilt can gnaw at us for a very long time. It erodes our self esteem, it shakes our confidence.

We need to realize that we are learning lessons throughout our whole lives. If we knew then what we know now, surely we might have made different choices. But that was not the situation. We made a choice.....it might have been a bad choice in retrospect, but it was our choice. Hopefully, we learned something, if it was a bad choice, and do not need to repeat the lesson.

We need to forgive ourselves. We need to love ourselves

We need to grow from the experience and move on

When we are willing to love ourselves, all guilt dissolves away

You see, UL really helps you. It is certainly a positive response to others, but the practice of UL really changes the person working with UL. We may not change the people we express love to, but we do change ourselves substantially by the practice of UL. We feel better. We project a positive attitude. We feel good inside. The world feels like a better place to us.

So, these simple common examples show how our choice to express UL makes our situation much better. It is a conscious choice initially. Eventually, it can become a habit.

I am going to describe six steps to working successfully with UL

1. **Think of love as an action, not a feeling.** A feeling is something we *get* from someone, and when we stop getting it, we often change our behavior somehow. If we have to do something, or be a certain way, in order to receive love, that love is *conditional*. Instead, if you start thinking of love as the behavior itself, the reward becomes the feeling you get when ***you*** act a certain way, not when someone else acts a certain way. And you can continue acting this way all the time, regardless of how other people behave--it becomes an act of generosity. As Stephanie Dowrick says, "love is not love except when it is generous."^[2] Feelings can not last, but you can renew them continuously with new actions.
2. **Often ask yourself, what is the most loving thing I can do for this particular person in this particular moment?** Love isn't really one size fits all; what might be a loving act toward one person could be harmful to another person, in that it

doesn't help them get closer to becoming a truly happy human being. UL is a new choice you can make in every situation, not a hard and fast rule you can apply to everyone all the time.

3. **Remember that love doesn't mean making sure someone is always comfortable.** If you believe loving someone is about fostering their growth, most people acknowledge that pain and discomfort are part of growth, and if you shield someone from all pain or discomfort, you are not loving them. So, don't confuse loving someone with blindly making them comfortable, satisfying their desires, and shielding them from any kind of pain. If you do, you are only making it difficult for them to grow.

4. **Consider that if love is unconditional, it is given to everyone freely, including yourself.** Another reason the previous step is important is because if you don't follow it, you're well on your way to becoming a people pleaser, which means you are not being unconditionally loving to yourself. Instead, recognize the times when doing what is best for you will occasionally have you out of sync with another - Maryanne Radmacher calls this understanding "the difference between tolerance and allowing mediocrity a plot in your garden."^[3]

5. **Forgive.** Even if someone doesn't apologize, it's inherently loving to both them and yourself to let go of your anger and resentment toward them. Keep in mind Piero Ferrucci's advice that forgiving "is not something we do, but something we are."^[4] Again, don't mistake being willing to forgive for letting people walk all over you. How you *act* (lovingly) toward the person will vary, but your ability to practice UL love will be clouded if you hold on to negative feelings.

6. **Allow yourself to reap the benefits.** If you've ever had a moment when you practiced UL, whether spontaneously or deliberately, you probably felt energized

and liberated, not drained and burdened. The more often you feel that inner high, the more you're loving unconditionally.

Tips

- Practice doing something for someone each day with love alone. Do it without expecting anything in return. Do it without anyone knowing it. For example, you can send email, text, or a letter to someone who you have not been in contact with for quite a while, especially someone who might need it,..... think lonely. Give compliments to other people. You can give a smile to a stranger passing by. You can pet your dog or cat. Do small things with great love each day. And watch your heart expand to more love.
- Love means wishing others to be happy. Love is about what we give not what we get.
- Many might feel a sweep of UL upon the birth of a child, a piece of music that touches you deeply, or seeing a beautiful sunset, a piece of art, or the smile of a child. That's not to say everyone does or should, or that you can't feel it otherwise. It just may be a useful way for some people to remember what UL love is supposed to feel like.
- Be nice and show love to toxic people. Being kind will pay off for both parties.

The Choice?

- Who do you perceive yourself to be right now? How do you want to experience life? Will you be more kind, gentle, forgiving, tolerant and loving? Or will you continue to give your power away to the fear and doubt that is so prevalent right now in our society? The choice is ultimately yours.

- You might consider a resolution to love unconditionally? Within you is an unlimited supply of love and you hold the key to its release. Fear and doubt, anger and hate, have no more control over our lives than we allow. Can it be that simple? It really is. Loving is a choice we can make every moment.
- Begin with yourself. Realize that you are a powerful, spiritual and angelic being and can create with love. Take care of your thoughts and feelings and make sure they reflect the loving you. Observe your actions and insure that they have a loving intent too.
- When our emotions get the best of us and the stress and concerns of life become a bit overwhelming, just remember we have tools of forgiveness, gratitude, and UL, to assist us in overcoming the negative experiences we encounter each day. Most things we concern ourselves over are not worth worrying about or holding on to. Expressing UL helps us to move our focus from our troubles to gratitude.
- When you are clear and receptive to your own higher, loving nature, you can then direct this love to people and places around you. Your peace becomes the peace for others. Your love becomes the love other people feel.
- Be the angel you are and choose to live freely, joyfully, and lovingly. In doing so, you make this a better world to live and love in.

So, in summary I want to leave you with these thoughts before we go to break.

UL is a more positive response to situations that trouble you

UL makes your world better, even though it may not change the other person

UL lifts your spirit and energizes you

UL for yourself releases guilt and lets you grow

UL, and that love alone has the power to heal all wounds, bind people together, and create relationships quite beyond our present capacity to imagine.

UL is a choice.....try it a little at a time and let it grow on you.

We are going to break for a few minutes, then we will come back for a period of discussion.

I would like you to think about a situation that troubles you. Then let's look at how UL might help with that troubling situation

I am particularly interested in discussing people that you just can not love. Let us explore if there are ways of viewing the situation with UL that might create a different perspective.