

Do You Need To Be Loved? Or, Love To Be Needed?

by

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I'm sure you have heard couple's of all ages say to each other "I love you." You would probably like hearing it said to you, if it's not already. Sometimes when one person says "I love you" to another person, the response is "me too." I find that an absurd response. What does it mean? That I love me too? A more appropriate response would be "I love you too" and even that isn't terribly poignant. It's kind of like someone asking "how are you" and you say "fine." It's automatic and somewhat meaningless. If someone significant in your life says to you "I love you" a good response is "to hear you say that makes me feel wonderful" or "I believe you and when I hear you say that I feel so good."

What makes matters worse is that our culture uses the word "love" extremely loosely. We love that movie and we love that car and we love that restaurant and we love that song and we love that book and we love that place and we love that pair of jeans or that shirt or that dress or those pair of shoes.....We're just so filled with love!! And yet we have the arrogance to think that we can actually make love! Love, like money, is not made, it is earned. The only place that makes money is the United States Mint. Everyone else earns it (or steals it which requires some effort, so it's working for it). .

Our American culture is linguistically impoverished when it comes to love. We really only have that one word to convey something which is more than a feeling; love is more like a state of being - as in "being in love." You can tell a spouse that you care for them, trust them, respect them, need them, want them...you could even tell them you would do anything for them, even die for them, and they won't perk up until you say you love them. It's as if the word "love" is a drug and unless we hear that word spoken to us, we continue to crave it. Nothing else will do. Traditionally, there are three types of love: Eros which is erotic love, Phileos which is brotherly love and Agape which is spiritual love. In modern America, all we have is love. And, although the popular Beatles song "all you need is love" may be true, we need to uplift love from its mundane, overused, misunderstood place in our culture to a recognition of its true stature.

Too often, when a person says "I love you" what they really want to hear in response is the same thing. They are actually saying "I want to hear you say you love me so I'm going to say I love you." And then you are supposed to say "I love you too." Or, the ridiculous "me too." The phrase "I love you" though, is generally not true. It would be more honest to say "I like you a lot" or "I feel very compatible with you" or "I feel very comfortable with you." However, a much more honest replacement statement for "I love you" is "I need you." Of course, that doesn't go over as well as "I love you." Yet, it's much more truthful. Our need to belong, to be connected,

to be intimate is very strong. What we often love in the other person is that they are satisfying a need of ours to be connected to another person. Our need to be connected motivates a great deal of our late adolescent and adult behavior.

However, the satisfaction of that need to be connected is not necessarily love. Love is, by definition, unconditional positive acceptance of any person at any time under any condition who might be exhibiting any behavior. And, as a people, we're not very good at that. We may not approve of the behavior; however, to love is to accept the person, without judgment, criticism or complaint. Although we can talk about "tough love" it might be better to call it "tough caring" as love is not tough - or rough. Nor is it bitter sweet. To quote I Corinthians (13:4-8a) *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."*

So, the question then arises, when we hear all these couples say "I love you" what's really being said? The answer, I believe, is "I need you to need me." And, there should be no shame or guilt or embarrassment in needing. Everybody needs others. No one likes being alone. We can deteriorate mentally and emotionally when alone in much the same way the body withers away without food. We need companionship, friendship, partners, colleagues and acquaintances. We need to belong, to be part of and contained within something larger than our individual self. We often mistakenly think that by hearing someone say to us "I love you" that all our needs for belonging and connectedness are met. They are not. This can become evident after several years of a relationship or a marriage when one or both parties find themselves needing more than the relationship can offer. Then, thinking another relationship will provide the satisfaction sought, we find ourselves entering another relationship only to find several years down the road that this new relationship by itself too does not satisfy the belonging needs.

If in fact we need to be loved, that need will be satisfied through belonging. We can belong to, and participate in, a family, a company, a community, a society and even global endeavors. By belonging and participating we will grow to feel loved by others (in the brotherly love sense of the word) and the need to be loved will be satisfied. If in fact we love to be needed, then we can have what we love through the very same activities as those that satisfied our need to be loved. For by participating in family, community, professional, social and global endeavors, we become a needed part of the larger whole. Participation in activities larger than our individual self satisfies our need to be needed by others.

The answer to the question that is the title of this article is both. We need both to be loved and we love to be needed - we need to be needed. Being needed makes us feel that we belong. Belonging makes us feel loved. We can achieve both by the single path of participation in something larger than our individual self. Whether it's family, work, community volunteer work, social activism or a little bit of each, we can find our need to be loved and our love to be needed satisfied. From that satisfaction, we can begin to love others. We can even share that satisfaction with a significant other making our primary relationship based on belonging needs that are already at least in part satisfied rather than placing the entire burden of that satisfaction on the relationship itself. This kind of primary relationship can last a very long time and does contribute to happiness.

