

Falling in and Out of Love by Donna Martin

FALLING IN... and OUT... OF LOVE

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Introduction

Has anything else in life been written about, defined, analyzed, or debated as much as "love"?

Rabindranath Tagore wrote: *Love is... an endless mystery, for it has nothing else to explain it.*

And yet explain it we try... again and again, in countless ways. Four hundred years before Christ, Euripides wrote that *Love is all we have, the only way that each can help the other.*

Take a moment at this point to ask yourself about your personal definition of love... write down some of the synonyms for love that come to mind, other words that evoke some of the important qualities of love for you.

LOVE IS: ...

Read some thoughts about "love" from famous people through the ages

Plato: *Love is the pursuit of the whole.*

Robert Frost: *Love is an irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired.*

George Sand: *There is only one happiness in life, to love and be loved.*

Jean Anouilh: *Love is, above all, the gift of oneself.*

D.H. Lawrence: *One must learn to love, and go through a good deal of suffering to get to it... and the journey is always towards the other soul.*

La Rochefoucauld: *There is only one kind of love, but there are a thousand different versions.*

H.L. Mencken: *Love is the triumph of imagination over intelligence.*

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Erich Fromm: *Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an ordination of character which determines the relatedness of the person to the whole world as a whole, not toward one object of love.*

Euripides: *Love distills desire upon the eyes; Love brings bewitching grace into the heart.*

Thomas Carlyle: *Love is the only game that is not called on account of darkness.*

Alexander Smith: *Love is but the discovery of ourselves in others, and the delight in the recognition.*

M. Scott Peck: *I define love thus: The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.*

Nathaniel Brandon: *Romantic love is not a myth waiting to be discarded, but, for most of us, a discovery waiting to be born.*

Boris Pasternak: *Compared to other feelings, love is an elemental cosmic force wearing a disguise of meekness... It is not a state of mind; it is the foundation of the universe.*

Samuel Butler: *God is love — I dare say. But what a mischievous devil love is!*

Antoine de Saint-Exupery: *Life has taught us that love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction.*

Blaise Pascal: *The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.*

The Prophet, Kahlil Gibran:

*Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself.
But if you love and must needs have desires, let these be your desires:
To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night.
To know the pain of too much tenderness.
To be wounded by your own understanding of love;
And to bleed willingly and joyfully.*

Your Personal Definition Of Love:

Each of us has a personal understanding of what love is — based on the very first experiences we had in life. If you did not spend your first years with your biologic parents, you may want to go through this process twice. First, consider the "parent substitutes" who were your primary caretakers at that time. Later, go through the process again imagining your biologic parents... who they were, what they were like, what you know about them and what you imagine they gave you. It is our impressions of the way things were that have the greatest impact subconsciously on us to create our attitudes and beliefs. What we imagine to be true has a stronger impression on us than what is actually true.

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When you are ready to begin, take a moment to sit quietly with your eyes closed (after reading this over) and recall your parents... let images, thoughts, feelings, memories, even body sensations, come and go as you remember these earliest relationships...

Spend a few minutes doing this and just notice what happens. You may want to make some note about your experience...

.....
Now, focus for a moment on your mother — going back to your earliest memories.

Ask yourself: **What was the gift I received from my mother?**

GIFT: _____

Let a word or phrase come up to represent her gift. If the words "love" "life" or "survival" come to mind, please be more specific and identify **how** she loved you, or what she gave you that helped you to survive... perhaps **affection** or **nurturing**, perhaps a **sense of humour** or a **love of nature**.

Now that you have recognized a gift (there may have been many... pick one that seems significant), ask yourself:

How did I feel hurt by my mother? (or something you needed more of from her... an unmet need.)

HURT: _____

(Perhaps your hurt was feeling **not accepted** or **criticised**, perhaps you felt **guilty**, or **not noticed**.)

Now that you have thought of a gift and a hurt related to your mother, please fill these in at the top two points of a triangle:

Gift

hurt

me

Now spend a few moments in silence again, focusing inward and recalling your father. Ask yourself:

What was the gift from my father?

GIFT: _____

(Perhaps he made you feel **special** or **intelligent**, or he gave you a **work ethic** or a **strong body**. The gifts, as much as the hurts, may have been genetically inherited and not necessarily intentional.)

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Just as the gifts are inextricably linked to our definition of love, so too are the hurts! Our unconscious memory works on the basis of associations. Whatever is associated with an experience becomes a necessary and intrinsic component of the experience for it to be remembered or re-recognized (known again) later.

Jacques Maritain: *We don't love qualities, we love a person; sometimes by reason of their defects as well as their qualities.*

Example: Laura recognized **strength** and **acknowledgement** as the gifts from her parents, **shame** and **rejection** as the hurts. Her marriage gave her both acknowledgement and a feeling of her own strength. Gradually, a behavior emerged that resulted in a feeling of shame in herself and rejection of her husband, which resulted in divorce.

Another relationship of Laura's also played out this kind of scenario. Love was recognized in a familiar form: strength and acknowledgement. As the relationship progressed, shame arose, resulting in the rejection of the mate and the relationship. Laura would unconsciously set herself or her partner up to complete her triangles. Since shame and rejection were hooked to love, she would create or invite them in order to feel *at home*.

There is also a loop between the four elements, where the existence of one element will automatically reinforce another. When Laura felt shame, for example, in a relationship, she would automatically become stronger.

Look again at your own triangles and notice how you may have invited or created the hurt in a relationship to satisfy your unconscious expectations. How do you set yourself or your partner up to bring in the elements of one or both triangles? How does the presence of both the gift and the hurt serve to reinforce each other?

Mother's gift hurt or unmet need

.me

Father's gift hurt or unmet need

Look at your triangles. Think about important relationships and ask yourself: Have the key relationships in your life been more like your **mother** triangle or like your **father** triangle? Have they been a combination of both?

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*Immature love says, "I love you because I need you."
Mature love says, "I need you because I love you."
Erich Fromm*

Most of the time we are unconscious of our expectations and our definitions of love. Realizing that *love is what each of us thinks it is* can give us a greater appreciation for our differences and for misunderstandings in relationships.

Here's another example: In Pat's triangles, humour is linked with both criticism and impatience. It is easy to see how this could develop into sarcasm. Pat would either tend to choose a mate who was sarcastic, or perceive his humour as sarcasm even when it wasn't intended as such, or even become sarcastic herself.

Who you love to be with is conditioned by your childhood experiences of love. When the necessary qualities are missing in your relationship, you will usually feel unloved.

For example: The gifts in Mary's triangles were affection and stability. If one or the other of these elements was absent for any length of time, Mary felt unloved. This became a serious issue when her husband decided to change jobs and was temporarily unemployed.

Think of the most recent important relationship in your life. Has the gift from your mother or from your father been most significant? Consider the possibility that one or both of the hurts from your triangles is part of your unconscious expectation of love... To complete the triangle imprint, which is a core belief about love and relationships, you would need to have at least one of the hurts show up in some form. You might have unconsciously attracted a person who could provide the hurt. (This is why so many women who were abused as children end up with an abusive mate.)

If your mate is not enough like one or both parents and does not provide the same hurt, it might be that you are the one who will provide it in order to complete the pattern and create the scenario from your childhood. Otherwise you don't quite feel at home.

For example, if your parent was cold and unaffectionate, you may become that way at some point in the relationship, particularly if you have picked an affectionate partner!

What often happens is that we **perceive** the hurt to be happening, whether or not it is actually there.

Diane, for example, recognized **disapproval** as the hurt from mother. Frequently in her marriage she felt disapproved of by her husband. She would even imagine certain looks he gave her to be evidence of his disapproval. She avoided telling him some things about herself, for fear of disapproval, creating gaps in their communication. Whether he was disapproving or not, she created this experience for herself by imagining it.

In your relationship, consider how you may have unconsciously chosen someone who could hurt you in the same way as you felt hurt as a child — or someone who also could not give you whatever your parents could not give you.

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Look again at the original hurts in your triangles. Everything has an “up” side and a “down” side. It may be that we attract the same hurts from a spouse in order to re-enact and hopefully heal the original wounds. It may also be true that the hurts have an “up” side, which our subconscious recognizes as a need.

For example, consider the “up” side of criticism. The one aspect of criticism, which is positive, is **being noticed**. (The same is true for disapproval. Diane would not have been disapproved of by a mother who didn’t notice or pay attention to what she was doing.)

Jane’s mother, on the other hand didn’t listen to her. Jane felt **unheard** — hurt by the lack of attention. Her marriage was a re-enactment of this, as Jane’s husband appeared to not hear her. He was so wrapped up in his job that he paid little attention to her problems and concerns. When Jane realized that the “up” side of this lack of attention was a tremendous amount of space and **freedom**, Jane felt differently. Her husband never interfered with or questioned her activities. She was free to do whatever she wanted to do, without her husband’s interference, unlike many of her friends.

Freedom is the “up” side of “abandonment”. When you are literally left alone — physically or emotionally — you are truly free to be who you are and to do whatever you want to do.

Example: Frank felt abandoned as a three-year-old when his mother died. He had several relationships as an adult where he’d been left, and others where he had been the one to leave. The issue came up again in his most recent relationship. He chose a woman who was very independent and who lived in another city. Every time her visits came to an end and she left, he felt “abandoned”. The pain of feeling abandoned over and over again became unbearable.

Instead of recognizing the “up” side or hidden gift that she was giving him — the space and alone time that he also needed, the gift of freedom that her love offered him — Frank saw only a repetition of his childhood pain. Since she never actually abandoned him, it was Frank who eventually pulled out of the relationship, providing the element of abandonment necessary to complete his expectations.

Rainer Maria Rilke: *For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation.*

It may be a real challenge for you to see the “up” side of a hurt, but it will be the key to healing relationship patterns that create suffering. When you feel hurt, you feel like a victim. When you realize that you are actually also being given a gift, you might have a totally different experience and response... one of gratitude! Responding from feeling grateful rather than hurt changes everything. As a victim, your natural tendency will be to protect yourself, probably in the same way you learned to cope and survive as a kid.

Ron, for example, suffered physical pain from abuse all through his childhood. One adult relationship in particular had been extremely abusive and caused him years of emotional pain and suffering. As with many abused children, Ron had learned to “dissociate” — to disconnect from his body and “go numb”. As a child, this was a necessary way to avoid feeling the pain.

As an adult, the same strategy continued unconsciously. In his most recent relationship there was no abuse, yet several issues arose that resembled issues from the previous relationship — issues that had previously resulted in causing him pain.

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The threat of pain, real or imagined, triggered the unconscious coping strategy of dissociation. Ron went “numb” and lost touch with any feelings for his partner. Believing he had fallen “out of love”, confused and disillusioned, he ended the relationship.

W. Somerset Maugham: *The great tragedy of life is not that men perish, but that they cease to love.*

Perhaps pain is the hardest thing to recognize as a gift. The one aspect of pain worth having is **feeling**, some would call it **aliveness**. Not feeling is like death — numbness — nothingness.

The “up” side of physical abuse, and the one aspect of it which is worth having, is physical contact... touch. The most positive expression of touch is called affection. The most negative expression of touch is abuse. Consider how something like tickling can be one extreme or the other — the same phenomenon manifesting positively or negatively.

It is worth noting here that when you recognize the “up” side of your original childhood hurts, you will know **what your mate needs most from you...**

Example: Frank had abandonment as a primary hurt. The women he attracted in relationships had an insatiable need for freedom, the “up” side of abandonment. They didn’t want to be abandoned, but they did need lots of space and time alone.

Example: Ron had been abused as a child. His partner in his present relationship, more than anything else, needed to be touched affectionately — lots of positive physical contact.

Example: Diane’s original hurt was disapproval. What her mate needed most from her was to be noticed (the “up” side of disapproval). He knew that she loved him when she paid attention to him.

Look again at your triangles. What does your partner in relationship need most from you?

.....
.....

This early relationship imprinting programs your definition of love and your expectations of your emotional partner. It also reveals the source of conflict and misunderstanding in your relationships.

From the **victim** point of view — your wounded inner child — you will expect to feel hurt when your partner offers you the gift which they are most capable of giving. When you can recognize the gift hidden in the hurt and realize the choices you can make, you become empowered. You no longer need to set your partner up to complete the triangles in dysfunctional ways. You will see your role in creating the kind of relationship you have as well as the options available to create an even better relationship, based on the most positive expression of the original gifts and the “up” side of the hurts.

*To love and win is the best thing.
(To love and lose, the next best.)*
William Thackeray

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Fill in the following:

The keys to a successful relationship for me are to manifest, for myself and my partner, the following elements:

.....

My GIFTS:

UP SIDE of the HURTS:

*Of all men's inborn dispositions, there is none more heroic than the love in him.
Everything else accepts defeat and dies,
but love will fight no-love every inch of the way.
Laurens Van Der Post*

Falling In Love

Here's an experiment to learn something about yourself:

Decide to fall in love... think about someone **as if** you were in love and **ACT** as if you were in love... whatever that means for you... **Notice** those thoughts and behaviors, and what, if any, are the effects?

Your first insight might be about the **objections** that arise to even doing the exercise. Either you thought, *"why bother, this won't work anyway"* (a belief that you have no power over falling in love)... or, *"oh, shit, what if it works — I might actually fall in love and then what?"* (This would give you a chance to look at your fears.)...

Common fears and unconscious beliefs:

1. Being in love is too **painful**.
2. It **can't last** anyway.
3. It means being **out of control** of my life.
4. It means **losing myself** in some way.
5. It means putting someone else **above me**.
6. It means **losing my freedom**.
7. It means I can't love or be loved by **others**.
8. It means I might end up with the wrong person — a **mistake**.
9. It means being **vulnerable**, to **rejection, abandonment**.
10. It means "**suffering**" ("passion").

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OTHER IDEAS:

As these objections arise, you also get a chance to see the very personal needs and desires that, when unconscious, result in "falling in love"... for example, perhaps you need:

1. to **feel** something... "passion", or "sexy", or "excited"...
2. **intimacy**, closeness, partnership, companionship...
3. a **home** — a place where you feel at peace, loved, accepted for who you are, where you can rest, where you belong...

Recognition of any of these needs may also bring up objections, depending on your past experiences and associations. Does your concept of "home", for example, raise beliefs about "it doesn't last long", you can't be fully yourself, no space or privacy, chaos... no peace, feelings not allowed ... poor communication, little affection...?

Objections to the idea of

1. feeling:
2. intimacy:
3. home:

Can you get beyond these objections and find new alternatives to these experiences? What can you imagine is possible?

.....

Falling out of Love:

Notice what comes up for you now... any thoughts about "why bother? Why do all that work? Shouldn't it be effortless? If I have to work at it, maybe it's not right for me..." (this relationship, this concept of "home"... whatever).

If you want to know how to **fall out of love**, listen carefully to your "why bother" voice. Can you feel how your energy ebbs away? How the spark fizzles? Can you observe a growing numbness... a neutrality? Notice what happens for you when you listen to the "why bothers"... body sensations, emotions, images, memories, thoughts... what happens?

To fall **out** of love, it is important that you focus on what you don't like about your beloved, not on what you do like... see the faults and block out the beauty.

When falling **out** of love it is important to look around for someone else... "it's not here, where is it?" (or is "it" within your own heart, and simply projected outward?)

Falling in Love:

Back to the experiment: falling in love. What if you **imagine** (mental) and **act as if** (physical) you're in love? What happens...?

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- Perhaps you notice a smile, as if your whole body is smiling... a softening and opening that happens.
- Perhaps the pain around your heart dissolves (was it fear?)
- Perhaps you notice some quality of **hope**, nothing specific, a feeling of **infinite possibilities**.
- Perhaps you begin to see his/her beauty, and to feel beautiful yourself.
- Perhaps everything looks beautiful... life is beautiful.
- Perhaps you feel excitement... something special is happening, a feeling like Christmas.
- Perhaps you feel a little fearful... you hear some "what if's".

When I act as if (or imagine) falling in love with.....,

I notice:

.....

What sustains a relationship?

What is bigger than falling in and out of love? Which of the following are true for you?

1. commitment — (choice extended over time)
2. liking him/her — enjoying being with him/her
3. optimism — a feeling of infinite possibilities
4. seeing beauty seeing beauty more clearly than "flaws"
5. faith in yourself — you won't lose yourself or give up being who you are
6. awareness and acceptance of change
7. freedom — to love & be loved by others
8. space — to be alone at times, and that aloneness can be embraced within relationship
9. faith — that relationship can be bigger than moods or feelings, bigger than change, bigger than aloneness or independence, bigger than freedom itself — that all of these can be allowed and embraced and contained in a relationship based on commitment, respect, trust, optimism, honesty and intimacy.
10. Others

.....

.....

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*Love gives naught but itself, and takes naught but from itself.
Love possesses naught nor would it be possessed.
For love is sufficient unto love.
Kahlil Gibran (The Prophet)*

The End of Relationship

Sometimes a relationship ends. The loss of anything is painful. Grieving is appropriate.

Missing the opportunity to grieve appropriately may create the necessity for another opportunity. At some point, when you're really strong enough to be vulnerable, brave enough to be fearful, and honest enough with yourself to express everything, all your stored up grief and sadness may be released at once.

Part of grieving is cleansing. Perhaps this is why there are tears... to help wash away the residue, the threads that keep you hooked to what you've lost. The letting go is painful, but right.

There is a way of seeing life that acknowledges the rightness of everything that happens. Can you look back at some event that appeared tragic at the time, the loss of a job, the end of a love, and see, along with the pain and sadness, a gift or blessing?

Perhaps a relationship ends because it is complete.

Paul Brenner, M.D.: *For any healthy relationship it takes two to say "yes" and one to say "no".*

Perhaps the timely completion of a relationship is an acknowledgement of its success, and *not* a sign of its failure.

In order to end a relationship successfully, a ritual or ceremony that honours it and celebrates its success may be helpful. When every reasonable attempt has been made to "work it out", to communicate with honesty and compassion, to understand each other's needs and views, to express feelings without pointing fingers, and to consider consequences realistically, it may be necessary to stand back and accept that it's over.

If possible, suggest to your partner that you'd like to celebrate the relationship with a completion ceremony. The important ingredients to bring to the ceremony you decide on are acceptance and appreciation. It won't work if one person is feeling like a victim. In that case, you may need to do the ritual alone, or with another friend. (The presence of a third person is recommended even when both partners are willing to celebrate and complete.)

Whether you do it together or alone, at the end of a relationship or years later, allow yourself to see the gift of the relationship. Acknowledge its purpose, what it achieved. Congratulate yourself (and your partner) for your role in that success. Appreciate your growth and your capacity for pain. Don't ever think it unnecessary to grieve. No matter how much gratitude you may feel that the relationship is over, it is a loss. Sadness (and grieving) is appropriate **along with** the celebration.

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*When one door of happiness closes, another opens,
but often we look so long at the closed door
that we do not see the one that has been
opened for us.*

Helen Keller

*You are seeking joy and peace in far-off places.
But the spring of joy is in your heart.
The haven of peace is in yourself.*

Sathya Sai Baba

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Now available: **Simply Being**: a reflective practice guide for helping professionals (Donna Martin and Marlena Field). Donna's books are available on: www.reflectivepresence.com.

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