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The Logic of Love

Chapter 1: Love

*I love sports
My dog loves me
I love my country
And my family*

*I love God and
My neighborhood
I love to think I'm
Doing what I should*

*I love you
And I love me
And I love. . . I love
Let me see. . .*

Love is the desire and willingness to do well for others. Love is alive when it is embraced as a personal value, as an attitude put into action. We will focus on appreciating it as a self-empowered choice, as compared to experiencing it as an emotion.

The premise is that love is the highest value in our lives. This is our starting point; *everything* rests on this assumption. By "the highest value," I mean that all other values are relative and situation-specific compared to the primacy of love. Values such as honesty, fairness, mercy, loyalty, affection, or peace are important because they are the colors into which the white light of love becomes refracted as it shines through the prism of our individual experience. Sometimes these subordinate values compete with each other for positions of relative importance, but the assumption is that they cannot compete with the supreme value of love. For example, speaking the truth is important. Yet it is a value that is regularly sacrificed for the sake of love:

"Where are we going for dinner?" asks Girlfriend on her birthday.

"I got us the best table at that restaurant on top of the World Trade Center," says Boyfriend, beaming with pride.

Yet when the elevator stops a few floors below the top and opens on a surprise party, everybody is smiling as Girlfriend compliments Boyfriend on his ruse.

Girlfriend is happy because too much honesty can spoil love. The value of truth was never intended to ruin a surprise party.

As well, truth should never be an excuse for cruelty:

"How do you like my hat?" asks Miss I. M. Insecure
"I think it's the most ridiculous piece of apparel you've worn in the past decade, and in your case, that's no easy feat to accomplish," snaps Mr. B. Little.

Just because someone may prefer the undiluted, graceless truth in all circumstances, hopefully che(1) does not try to justify making others feel like a steaming pile of poop just because they do not have the same thick skin that protects the vigilant defender of Unbridled-Truth-In-All-Circumstances. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," when taken too literally, means imposing one's personal prioritization of the values that are subordinate to love. However, if the "do" in "Do unto others" means *love others as they are best loved*, then this principle can truly

be a reflection of prioritizing the value of love. With love leading the way, we can come up with many creative ways of "doing unto others" that are neither insensitive to, nor catering to, another's weaknesses.

When we lead with love, truth falls from an absolute to a relative value. Sometimes it is easy to appreciate when we should sacrifice truth for the sake of love. The above examples were used to make this as black and white as possible. Of course, life is filled with gray areas as well. Here comes Joe Gray, now. Let's see if we can solve his problem.

"Should I tell my spouse that I cheated?" pleads Mr. Gray. "I feel so bad. I'm sure it will never happen again. Should I burden her with the truth? If I don't tell her, maybe I'll end up being less judgmental of her. We could end up having a much better relationship in the long run."

Sorry, Joe, but don't look for an answer here. This is not *Rationalizations 101*. Nor is it about creating some kind of decision-tree for instant application to all the sordid situations in which we may find ourselves. The point here is that all too often in life, when times get tough, a value other than love (such as truth) becomes the standard for measuring human worth. Maybe for that particular situation it is appropriate, and maybe it isn't. But if it is, then this is because *that* value is the best reflection of love in *that* particular situation. Tomorrow's problems may be different. As long as love is the highest value, we are far less likely to be viewed by others or ourselves as two-faced hypocrites when the next situation calls for a reprioritization of the values that are subordinate to love. Love is a chameleon. Sometimes its color is honesty; sometimes it is loyalty; sometimes it is keeping or breaking a promise. And sometimes love may be expressed by eating dinner.

Do we eat to live or live to eat? I hope that every morsel of food that passes through our lips is succulent and juicy. May we never be rushed through a single meal. May there always be enough to give us that comfortably satisfied feeling. And above all, may we come to understand that our appreciation of the good things in life, and our pursuit of them, does not necessarily make us a bunch of selfish sinners who should be ashamed for not having a higher commitment to love. I am not here to say how we should strike the balance between engaging in activities that are directly serviceable to others and taking "down time." Replenishing our physical, mental, and spiritual bodies is essential if we are to have the energy to love others directly. But I do wish to promote the idea that even when replenishing, we can appreciate such experiences as extensions of our commitment to love.

Whether we should have given that money to the poor rather than having stuffed ourselves with steak and lobster last night is a level of micromanagement on which I wish us all the best of luck. Unfortunately, some of us can only dream of being plagued by such "tough" decisions. The intent of this book is to inspire us to make decisions that define our spiritual lives so that love flows more easily. Love does not flow easily when our stomachs are empty, when we are experiencing the preoccupation that comes with too much stress or, in the most extreme case, when we are dead. Although there may be times in life when we truly are called upon to die for love, this does not mean we should set about killing ourselves for love. Though it may be difficult to clearly define the ceiling of excessive living, we should at least be comfortable with our feet firmly planted on the floor of necessities.

Understanding and appreciating this difference can help create the inner peace that inspires commitment to the value of love. Living love is far more important than understanding love, yet an understanding of love can certainly help us to better live by this value. On the subject of love, Lou Reed once sang, "Between thought and expression there lies a lifetime." Clarifying our thoughts about love provides us an opportunity to express it better.

The Logic of Love should not be read with the intention of trying to achieve and maintain an emotional state of bliss. Naturally, if loving other people feels good, this supports the value of love. I do not mean to turn a deaf ear to the issue of emotions. However, such is the tail, not the dog. Love may indeed generate the broadest range and deepest levels of emotional satisfaction. But bear in mind that this book will be most beneficial to the reader who has an eye toward being of service to others, rather than on achieving emotional consolation for oneself. Attitude is everything. If emotional satisfaction is seen as the bonus, not the goal, then you will stand the best chance of appreciating my intended meaning.

Defining love as the desire and willingness to do well for others is the easy part. Shedding the

emotional baggage that can drag down our appreciation of love is a lifelong process. Balancing the giving with the receiving is love's challenge to us all. Prioritizing the values that are subordinate to love is the art of living. My hope is that this book will make the process, art, and challenge of living a bit easier.

Footnote:

After my son was conceived, I became especially frustrated with the English language. The lack of an androgynous pronoun made it impossible for me to address this developing child appropriately. I was loath to refer to him as "it." Not knowing whether I was to become the father of a son or daughter, "he" and "she" seemed inappropriate. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that the only reason why there are no androgynous pronouns is because as a culture we are slothful and haphazard when it comes to progressively developing our language. This slothfulness undermines our ability to think and communicate clearly. Contemporary writers have been awkwardly trying to deal with the situation by using "s/he" or using "he" in one chapter and "she" in the next. Similar frustrations have come up for writers who want to use a pronoun for God that is personal but androgynous.

We can do better. Please join with me in using the following new words so that we can put an end to this age-long problem. Who put us in charge of such a task, you ask? At the very least, we have the silent consent from all those before us and around us who have forsaken this responsibility. So, here they are (Can we have a drum roll, please!?!):

Che: (pronounced like "cheat" without the "t") an androgynous specific pronoun as compared to the androgynous, unspecific pronoun "one".

Chen: (pronounced like "check" but with an "n") the direct object of the androgynous, specific pronoun *che*. *Chen* is an androgynous substitute for *him* and *her*.

Chens: the possessive form of *chen*. As with *his* and *hers*, the possessive form is spelled without an apostrophe.

Chenself: the reflexive form of *chen*.

At first the use and sound of these words may seem awkward. This is because 1) we have so long denied ourselves the ability to express these thoughts, and 2) new words by their nature tend to have an unfamiliar ring to them. Short new words can be especially odd sounding because so many of the combinations of sounds for short words have already been used. In time, however, with regular use and the willingness to share these words with others, they will slip into our thoughts and expressions as unnoticed as the air we breath.

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