Love

M. Scott Peck

Love Defined

Discipline, it has been suggested, is the means of human spiritual evolution. This section will examine what lies in the back of discipline—what provides the motive, the energy for discipline. This force I believe to be love. I am very conscious of the fact that in attempting to examine love we will be beginning to toy with mystery. In a very real sense we will be attempting to examine the unexaminable and to know the unknowable. Love is too large, too deep ever to be truly understood or measured or limited within the framework of words. I would not write this if I did not believe the attempt to have value, but no matter how valuable, I begin with the certain knowledge that the attempt will be in some ways inadequate.

One result of the mysterious nature of love is that no one has ever, to my knowledge, arrived at a truly satisfactory definition of love. In an effort to explain it, therefore, love has been divided into various categories: *eros*, *philia*, *agape*; perfect love and imperfect love, and so on. I am presuming, however, to give a single definition of love, again with the awareness that it is likely to be in some way or ways inadequate. I define love thus: The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.

At the outset I would like to comment briefly on this definition before proceeding to a more thorough elaboration. First, it may be noticed that it is a teleological definition, the behavior is defined in terms of the goal or purpose it seems to serve—in this case, spiritual growth. Scientists tend to hold teleological definitions suspect, and perhaps they will with this one. I did not arrive at it, however, through a clearly teleological process of thinking. Instead I arrived at it through observation in my clinical practice of psychiatry (which includes self-observation), in which the definition of love is a matter of considerable import. This is because patients are generally very confused as to the nature of love. For instance, a timid young man reported to me: "My mother loved me so much she wouldn't let me take the school bus to school until my senior year in high school, even then I had to beg her to let me go. I guess she was afraid that I would get hurt, so she drove me to and from school every day, which was very hard on her. She really loved me." In the treatment of this individual's timidity it was necessary, as it is in many other cases, to teach him that his mother might have been motivated by something other than love, and that what seems to be love is often not love at all. It has been out of such experience that I accumulated a body of examples of what seemed to be acts of love and what seemed not to be love. One of the major distinguishing features between the two seemed to be the conscious or unconscious purpose in the mind of the lover or non-lover.

Second, it may be noticed that, as defined, love is a strangely circular process. For the process of extending one's self is an evolutionary process. When one has successfully extended one's limits, one has then grown into a larger state of being. Thus the act of loving is an act of self-evolution even when the purpose of the act is someone else's growth. It is through reaching toward evolution that we evolve.

Third, this unitary definition of love includes self-love with love for the other. Since I am human and you are human, to love humans means to love myself as well as you. To be dedicated to human

spiritual development is to be dedicated to the race of which we are a part, and this therefore means dedication to our own development as well as "theirs." Indeed, as has been pointed out, we are incapable of loving another unless we love ourselves, just as we are incapable of teaching our children self-discipline unless we ourselves are self-disciplined. It is actually impossible to forsake our own spiritual development in favor of someone else's. We cannot forsake self-discipline and at the same time be disciplined in our care for another. We cannot be a source of strength unless we nurture our own strength. As we proceed in our exploration of the nature of love, I believe it will become clear that not only do self-love and love of others go hand in hand but that ultimately they are indistinguishable.

Fourth, the act of extending one's limits implies effort. One extends one's limits only by exceeding them, and extending limits requires effort. When we love someone our love becomes demonstrable or real only through our exertion—through the fact that for that someone (or for ourselves) we take an extra step or walk an extra mile. Love is not effortless. To the contrary, love is effortful.

Finally, by use of the word "will" I have attempted to transcend the distinction between desire and action. Desire is not necessarily translated into action. Will is desire of sufficient intensity that it *is* translated into action. The difference between the two is equal to the difference between saying "I would like to go swimming tonight" and "I will go swimming tonight." Everyone in our culture desires to some extent to be loving, yet many are not in fact loving. I therefore conclude that the desire to love is not itself love. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love. No matter how much we may think we are loving, if we are in fact not loving, it is because we have chosen not to love and therefore do not love despite our good intentions. On the other hand, whenever we do actually exert ourselves in the cause of spiritual growth, it is because we have chosen to do so. The choice to love has been made.

As I indicated, patients who come to psychotherapy are invariably found to be more or less confused about the nature of love. This is because in the face of the mystery of love misconceptions about it abound. While this book will not remove from love its mystery, I hope it will clarify matters sufficiently to help do away with these misconceptions, which cause suffering not only to patients but to all people as they attempt to make sense of their own experiences. Some of this suffering seems to me unnecessary, since these popular misconceptions could be made less popular through the teaching of a more precise definition of love. I have therefore chosen to begin exploring the nature of love by examining what love is not.

Falling in "Love"

Of all the misconceptions about love, the most powerful and pervasive is the belief that "falling in love" is love or at least one of the manifestations of love. It is a potent misconception, because falling in love is subjectively experienced in a very powerful fashion as an experience of love. When a person falls in love what he or she certainly feels is "I love him" or "I love her." But two problems are immediately apparent. The first is that the experience of falling in love is especially a sex-linked erotic experience. We do not fall in love with our children even though we may love them very deeply. We do not fall in love with our friends of the same sex—unless we are homosexually oriented—even though we may care for them greatly. We fall in love only when we are consciously or unconsciously sexually motivated. The second problem is that the experience of falling in love is invariably temporary. No matter whom we fall in love with, we sooner or later fall out of love if the relationship continues long enough. This is not to say that we invariably cease loving the person with whom we fell in love. But it is to say that the feeling of ecstatic lovingness that characterizes the

experience of falling in love always passes. The honeymoon always ends. The bloom of romance always fades.

To understand the nature of the phenomenon of falling in love and the inevitability of its ending, it is necessary to examine the nature of what psychiatrists call ego boundaries. From what we can ascertain by indirect evidence, it appears that the newborn infant during the first few months of its life does not distinguish between itself and the rest of the universe. When it moves its arms and legs, the world is moving. When it is hungry, the world is hungry. When it sees its mother move, it is as if it is moving. When its mother sings, the baby does not know that it is itself not making the sound. It cannot distinguish itself from the crib, the room and its parents. The animate and the inanimate are the same. There is no distinction yet between I and thou. It and the world are one. There are no boundaries, no separations. There is no identity.

But with experience the child begins to experience itself—namely, as an entity separate from the rest of the world. When it is hungry, mother doesn't always appear to feed it. When it is playful, mother doesn't always want to play. The child then has the experience of its wishes not being its mother's command. Its will is experienced as something separate from its mother's behavior. A sense of the "me" begins to develop. This interaction between the infant and the mother is believed to be the ground out of which the child's sense of identity begins to grow. It has been observed that when the interaction between the infant and its mother is grossly disturbed—for example, when there is no mother, no satisfactory mother substitute or when because of her own mental illness the mother is totally uncaring or uninterested—then the infant grows into a child or adult whose sense of identity is grossly defective in the most basic ways.

As the infant recognizes its will to be its own and not that of the universe, it begins to make other distinctions between itself and the world. When it wills movement, its arm waves before its eyes, but neither the crib nor the ceiling moves. Thus the child learns that its arm and its will are connected, and therefore that its arm is *its* and not something or someone else's. In this manner, during the first year of life, we learn the fundamentals of who we are and who we are not, what we are and what we are not. By the end of our first year we know that this is my arm, my foot, my head, my tongue, my eyes and even my viewpoint, my voice, my thoughts, my stomachache, and my feelings. We know our size and our physical limits. These limits are our boundaries. The knowledge of these limits inside our minds is what is meant by ego boundaries.

The development of ego boundaries is a process that continues through childhood into adolescence and even into adulthood, but the boundaries established later are more psychic than physical. For instance, the age between two and three is typically a time when the child comes to terms with the limits of its power. While before this time the child has learned that its wish is not necessarily its mother's command, it still clings to the possibility that its wish might be its mother's command and the feeling that its wish should be her command. It is because of this hope and feeling that the two-year-old usually attempts to act like a tyrant and autocrat, trying to give orders to its parents, siblings and family pets as if they were menials in its own private army, and responds with regal fury when they won't be dictated to. Thus parents speak of this age as "the terrible twos." By the age of three the child has usually become more tractable and mellow as a result of an acceptance of the reality of its own relative powerlessness. Still, the possibility of omnipotence is such a sweet, sweet dream that it cannot be completely given up even after several years of very painful confrontation with one's own impotence. Although the child of three has come to accept the reality of the boundaries of its power, it will continue to escape occasionally for some years to come into a world of fantasy in which the possibility of omnipotence (particularly its own) still exists. This is the world of Superman and Captain Marvel. Yet gradually even the superheroes are given up, and by the time of mid-adolescence, young people know that they are individuals, confined to the boundaries of their flesh and the limits of their power, each one a relatively frail and important organism, existing only by

cooperation within a group of fellow organisms called society. Within this group they are not particularly distinguished, yet they are isolated from others by their individual identities, boundaries and limits.

It is lonely behind these boundaries. Some people—particularly those whom psychiatrists call schizoid—because of unpleasant, traumatizing experiences in childhood, perceive the world outside of themselves as unredeemably dangerous, hostile, confusing and unnurturing. Such people feel their boundaries to be protecting and comforting and find a sense of safety in their loneliness. But most of us feel our loneliness to be painful and yearn to escape from behind the walls of our individual identities to a condition in which we can be more unified with the world outside of ourselves. The experience of falling in love allows us this escape—temporarily. The essence of the phenomenon of falling in love is a sudden collapse of a section of an individual's ego boundaries, permitting one to merge his or her identity with that of another person. The sudden release of oneself from oneself, the explosive pouring out of oneself into the beloved, and the dramatic surcease of loneliness accompanying this collapse of ego boundaries is experienced by most of us as ecstatic. We and our beloved are one! Loneliness is no more!

In some respects (but certainly not in all) the act of falling in love is an act of regression. The experience of merging with the loved one has in it echoes from the time when we are merged with our mothers in infancy. Along with the merging we also re-experience the sense of omnipotence which we had to give up in our journey out of childhood. All things seem possible! United with our beloved we feel we can conquer all obstacles. We believe that the strength of our love will cause the forces of opposition to bow down in submission and melt away into the darkness. All problems will be overcome. The future will be all right. The unreality of these feelings when we have fallen in love is essentially the same as the unreality of the two-year-old who feels itself to be king of the family and the world with power unlimited.

Just as reality intrudes upon the two-year-old's fantasy of omnipotence so does reality intrude upon the fantastic unity of the couple who have fallen in love. Sooner or later, in response to the problems of daily living, the individual will reassert itself. He wants to have sex; she doesn't. She wants to go to the movies, he doesn't. He wants to put money in the bank; she wants a dishwasher. She wants to talk about her job; he wants to talk about his. She doesn't like his friends; he doesn't like hers. So both of them, in the privacy of their hearts, begin to come to the sickening realization that they are not one with the beloved and will continue to have his or her own desires, tastes, prejudices and timing different from the other's. One by one, gradually or suddenly, the ego boundaries snap back into place; gradually or suddenly, they fall out of love. Once again they are two separate individuals. At this point they begin either to dissolve the ties of their relationship or to initiate the work of real loving.

By my use of the word "real" I am implying that the perception that we are loving when we fall in love is a false perception—that real love will be deferred until later in this section. However, by stating that it is when a couple falls out of love they may begin to really love I am also implying that real love does not have its roots in a feeling of love. To the contrary, real love often occurs in a context in which the feeling of love is lacking, when we act lovingly despite the fact that we don't feel loving. Assuming the reality of the definition of love with which we started, the experience of "falling in love" is not real love for the several reasons that follow.

Falling in love is not an act of will. It is not a conscious choice. No matter how open to or eager for it we may be, the experience may still elude us. Contrarily, the experience may capture us at times when we are definitely not seeking it, when it is inconvenient and undesirable. We are as likely to fall in love with someone with whom we are obviously ill matched as with someone more suitable. Indeed, we may not even like or admire the object of our passion, yet, try as we might, we may not be

able to fall in love with a person whom we deeply respect and with whom a deep relationship would be in all ways desirable. This is not to say that the experience of falling in love is immune to discipline. Psychiatrists, for instance, frequently fall in love with their patients, just as their patients fall in love with them, yet out of duty to the patients and their role as psychiatrist, they are usually able to abort the collapse of their ego boundaries and give up the patient as a romantic object. The struggle and suffering of the discipline involved may be enormous. But discipline and will can only control the experience; they cannot create it. We can choose how to respond to the experience of falling in love, but we cannot choose the experience itself.

Falling in love is not an extension of one's limits or boundaries; it is a partial and temporary collapse of them. The extension of one's limits requires effort; falling in love is effortless. Lazy and undisciplined individuals are as likely to fall in love as energetic and dedicated ones. Once the precious moment of falling in love has passed and the boundaries have snapped back into place, the individual may be disillusioned, but is usually none the larger for the experience. When limits are extended or stretched, however, they tend to stay stretched. Real love is a permanently self-enlarging experience. Falling in love is not.

Falling in love has little to do with purposively nurturing one's spiritual development. If we have any purpose in mind when we fall in love it is to terminate our own loneliness and perhaps insure this result through marriage. Certainly we are not thinking of spiritual development. Indeed, after we have fallen in love and before we have fallen out of love again we feel that we have arrived, that the heights have been attained, that there is both no need and no possibility of going higher. We do not feel ourselves to be in any need of development; we are totally content to be where we are. Our spirit is at peace. Nor do we perceive our beloved as being in need of spiritual development. To the contrary, we perceive him or her as perfect, as having been perfected. If we see any faults in our beloved, we perceive them as insignificant—little quirks or darling eccentricities that only add color and charm.

If falling in love is not love, then what is it other than a temporary and partial collapse of ego boundaries? I do not know. But the sexual specificity of the phenomenon leads me to suspect that it is a genetically determined instinctual component of mating behavior. In other words, the temporary collapse of ego boundaries that constitutes falling in love is a stereotypic response of human beings to a configuration of internal sexual drives and external sexual stimuli, which serves to increase the probability of sexual pairing and bonding so as to enhance the survival of the species. Or to put it in another, rather crass way, falling in love is a trick that our genes pull on our otherwise perceptive mind to hoodwink or trap us into marriage. Frequently the trick goes awry one way or another, as when the sexual drives and stimuli are homosexual or when other forces—parental interference, mental illness, conflicting responsibilities or mature self-discipline—supervene to prevent the bonding. On the other hand, without this trick, this illusory and inevitably temporary (it would not be practical were it not temporary) regression to infantile merging and omnipotence, many of us who are happily or unhappily married today would have retreated in wholehearted terror from the realism of the marriage vows.

The Myth of Romantic Love

To serve as effectively as it does to trap us into marriage, the experience of falling in love probably must have as one of its characteristics the illusion that the experience will last forever. This illusion is fostered in our culture by the commonly held myth of romantic love, which has its origins in our favorite childhood fairy tales, wherein the prince and princess, once united, live happily forever after. The myth of romantic love tells us, in effect, that for every young man in the world there is a young woman who was "meant for him," and vice versa. Moreover, the myth implies that there is only one

man meant for a woman and only one woman for a man and this has been predetermined "in the stars." When we meet the person for whom we are intended, recognition comes through the fact we that we fall in love. We have met the person for whom all the heavens intended us, and since the match is perfect, we will then be able to satisfy all of each other's needs forever and ever, and therefore live happily forever after in perfect union and harmony. Should it come to pass, however, that we do not satisfy or meet all of each other's needs and friction arises and we fall out of love, then it is clear that a dreadful mistake was made, we misread the stars, we did not hook up with our one and only perfect match, what we thought was love was not real or "true" love, and nothing can be done about the situation except to live unhappily ever after or get divorced.

While I generally find that great myths are great precisely because they represent and embody great universal truths (and will explore several such myths later in this book), the myth of romantic love is a dreadful lie. Perhaps it is a necessary lie in that it ensures the survival of the species by its encouragement and seeming validation of the falling-in-love experience that traps us into marriage. But as a psychiatrist I weep in my heart almost daily for the ghastly confusion and suffering that this myth fosters. Millions of people waste vast amounts of energy desperately and futilely attempting to make the reality of their lives conform to the unreality of the myth. Mrs. A. subjugates herself absurdly to her husband out of a feeling of guilt. "I didn't really love my husband when we married," she says, "I pretended I did. I guess I tricked him into it, so I have no right to complain about him, and I owe it to him to do whatever he wants." Mr. B. laments: "I regret I didn't marry Miss C. I think we could have had a good marriage. But I didn't feel head over heels in love with her, so I assumed she couldn't be the right person for me." Mrs. D., married for two years, becomes severely depressed without apparent cause, and enters therapy stating: "I don't know what's wrong. I've got everything I need, including a perfect marriage." Only months later can she accept the fact that she has fallen out of love with her husband but that this does not mean that she made a horrible mistake. Mr. E., also married two years, begins to suffer intense headaches in the evenings and can't believe they are psychosomatic. "My home life is fine. I love my wife as much as the day I married her. She's everything I ever wanted," he says. But his headaches don't leave him until a year later, when he is able to admit, "she bugs the hell out of me the way she is always wanting, wanting, wanting things without regard to my salary," and then is able to confront her with her extravagance. Mr. and Mrs. F. acknowledge to each other that they have fallen out of love and then proceed to make each other miserable by mutual rampant infidelity as they each search for the one "true love," not realizing that their very acknowledgment could mark the beginning of the work of their marriage instead of its end. Even when couples have acknowledged that the honeymoon is over, that they are no longer romantically in love with each other and are able still to be committed to their relationship, they still cling to the myth and attempt to conform their lives to it. "Even though we have fallen out of love, if we act by sheer will power as if we still were in love, then maybe romantic love will return to our lives," their thinking goes. These couples prize togetherness. When they enter couples group therapy (which is the setting in which my wife and I and our close colleagues conduct most serious marriage counseling), they sit together, speak for each other, defend each other's faults and seek to present to the rest of the group a united front, believing this unity to be a sign of the relative health of their marriage and a prerequisite for its improvement. Sooner or later, and usually sooner, we must tell most couples that they are too much married, too closely coupled, and that they need to establish some psychological distance from each other before they can even begin to work constructively on their problems. Sometimes it is actually necessary to physically separate them, directing them to sit apart from each other in the group circle. It is always necessary to ask them to refrain from speaking for each other or defending each other against the group. Over and over again we must say, "Let Mary speak for herself, John," and "John can defend himself, Mary, he's strong enough." Ultimately, if they stay in therapy, all couples learn that a true acceptance of their own and each other's individuality and separateness is the only foundation upon which a mature marriage can be based and real love can grow.

More About Ego Boundaries

Having proclaimed that the experience of "falling in love" is a sort of illusion which in no way constitutes real love, let me conclude by shifting into reverse and pointing out that falling in love is in fact very, very close to real love. Indeed, the misconception that falling in love is a type of love is so potent precisely because it contains a grain of truth.

The experience of real love also has to do with ego boundaries, since it involves an extension of one's limits. One's limits are one's ego boundaries. When we extend our limits through love, we do so by reaching out, so to speak, toward the beloved, whose growth we wish to nurture. For us to be able to do this, the beloved object must first become beloved to us; in other words, we must be attracted toward, invested in and committed to an object outside of ourselves, beyond the boundaries of self. Psychiatrists call this process of attraction, investment and commitment "cathexis" and say that we "cathect" the beloved object. But when we cathect an object outside of ourselves we also psychologically incorporate a representation of that object into ourselves. For example, let us consider a man who gardens for a hobby. It is a satisfying and consuming hobby. He "loves" gardening. His garden means a lot to him. This man has cathected his garden. He finds it attractive, he has invested himself in it, he is committed to it—so much so that he may jump out of bed early Sunday morning to get back to it, he may refuse to travel away from it, and he may even neglect his wife for it. In the process of his cathexis and in order to nurture his flowers and shrubs he learns a great deal. He comes to know much about gardening—about soils and fertilizers, rooting and pruning. And he knows his particular garden—its history, the types of flowers and plants in it, its layout, its problems and even its future. Despite the fact that the garden exists outside of him, through his cathexis it has also come to exist within him. His knowledge of it and the meaning it has for him are part of him, part of his identity, part of his history, part of his wisdom. By loving and cathecting his garden he has in quite a real way incorporated the garden within him, and by this incorporation his self has become enlarged and his ego boundaries extended.

What transpires then in the course of many years of loving, of extending our limits for our cathexes, is a gradual but progressive enlargement of the self, an incorporation within of the world without, and a growth, a stretching and a thinning of our ego boundaries. In this way, the more and longer we extend ourselves, the more we love, the most blurred becomes the distinction between the self the world. We become identified with the world. And as our ego boundaries become blurred and thinned, we begin more and more to experience the same sort of feeling of ecstasy that we have when our ego boundaries partially collapse and we "fall in love." Only, instead of having merged temporarily and unrealistically with a single beloved object, we have merged realistically and more permanently with much of the world. A "mystical union" with the entire world may be established. The feeling of ecstasy or bliss associated with this union, while perhaps more gentle and less dramatic than that associated with falling in love, is nonetheless much more stable and lasting and ultimately satisfying. It is the difference between the peak experience, typified by falling in love, and what Abraham Maslow has referred to as the "plateau experience." The heights are not suddenly glimpsed and lost again; they are attained forever.

It is obvious and generally understood that sexual activity and love, while they may occur simultaneously, often are disassociated, because they are basically separate phenomena. It itself, making love is not an act of love. Nonetheless the experience of sexual intercourse, and particularly of orgasm (even in masturbation), is an experience also associated with a greater or lesser degree of collapse of ego boundaries and attendant ecstasy. It is because of this collapse of ego boundaries that we may shout at the moment of climax "I love you" or "Oh, God" to a prostitute for whom moments later, after the ego boundaries have snapped back into place, we may feel no shred of affection, liking or investment. This is not to say that the ecstasy of the orgasmic experience cannot be heightened by

sharing it with one who is beloved; it can. But even without a beloved partner or any partner the collapse of ego boundaries occurring in conjunction with orgasm may be total; for a second we may totally forget who we are, lose track of self, be lost in time and space, be outside of ourselves, be transported. We may become one with the universe. But only for a second.

In describing the prolonged "oneness with the universe" associated with real love as compared to the momentary oneness of orgasm, I used the words "mystical union." Mysticism is essentially a belief that reality is oneness. The most literal of mystics believe that our common perception of the universe as containing multitudes of discrete objects—stars, planets, trees, birds, houses, ourselves—all separated from one another by boundaries is a misperception, an illusion. To this consensual misperception, this world of illusion that most of us mistakenly believe to be real, Hindus and Buddhists apply the word "Maya." They and other mystics hold that true reality can be known only by experiencing the oneness through a giving up of ego boundaries. It is impossible to really see the unity of the universe as long as one continues to see oneself as a discrete object, separate and distinguishable from the rest of the universe in any way, shape or form. Hindus and Buddhists frequently hold, therefore, that the infant before the development of ego boundaries knows reality, while adults do not. Some even suggest that the path toward enlightenment or knowledge of the oneness of reality requires that we regress or make ourselves like infants. This can be a dangerously tempting doctrine for certain adolescents and young adults who are not prepared to assume adult responsibilities, which seem frightening and overwhelming and demanding beyond their capacities. "I do not have to go through all this," such a person may think. "I can give up trying to be an adult and retreat from adult demands into sainthood." Schizophrenia, however, rather than sainthood, is achieved by acting on this supposition.

Most mystics understand the truth that was elaborated at the end of the discussion of discipline: namely, that we must possess or achieve something before we can give it up and still maintain our competence and viability. The infant without its ego boundaries may be in closer touch with reality than its parents, but it is incapable of surviving without the care of these parents and incapable of communicating its wisdom. The path to sainthood goes through adulthood. There are no quick and easy shortcuts. An identity must be established before it can be transcended. One must find one's self before one can lose it. The temporary release from ego boundaries associated with falling in love, sexual intercourse or the use of certain psychoactive drugs may provide us with a glimpse of Nirvana, but not with Nirvana itself. It is a thesis of this book that Nirvana or lasting enlightenment or true spiritual growth can be achieved only through the persistent exercise of real love.

In summary, then, the temporary loss of ego boundaries involved in falling in love and in sexual intercourse not only leads us to make commitments to other people from which real love may begin but also give us a foretaste of (and therefore an incentive for) the more lasting mystical ecstasy that can be ours after a lifetime of love. As such, therefore, while falling in love is not itself love, it is a part of the great and mysterious scheme of love.

Dependency

The second most common misconception about love is the idea that dependency is love. This is a misconception with which psychotherapists must deal on a daily basis. Its effects is seen most dramatically in an individual who makes an attempt or gesture or threat to commit suicide or who becomes incapacitatingly depressed in response to a rejection or separation from a spouse or lover. Such a person says, 'I do not want to live, I cannot live without my husband [wife, girlfriend, boyfriend], I love him [or her] so much'. And when I respond, as I frequently do, 'You are mistaken; you do not love your husband [wife, girlfriend, boyfriend]'. 'What do you mean?' is the angry question. 'I just told you I can't live without him [or her]'. I try to explain. 'What you describe is

parasitism, not love. When you require another individual for your survival, you are a parasite on that individual. There is no choice, no freedom involved in your relationship. It is a matter of necessity rather than love. Love is the free exercise of choice. Two people love each other only when they are quite capable of living without each other but *choose* to live with each other'.

I define dependency as the inability to experience wholeness or to function adequately without the certainty that one is being actively cared for by another. Dependency in physically healthy adults is pathological—it is sick, always a manifestation of a mental illness or defect. It is to be distinguished from what are commonly referred to as dependency needs or feelings. We all—each and every one of us—even if we try to pretend to others and to ourselves that we don't—have dependency needs and feelings. All of us have desires to be babied, to be nurtured without effort on our parts, to be cared for by persons stronger than us who have our interests truly at heart. No matter how strong we are, no matter how caring and responsible and adult, if we look clearly into ourselves we will find the wish to be taken care of for a change. Each one of us, no matter how old and mature, looks for and would like to have in his or her life a satisfying mother figure and father figure. But for most of us these desires or feelings do not rule our lives; they are not the predominant theme of our existence. When they do rule our lives and dictate the quality of our existence, then we have something more than just dependency needs or feelings, we are dependent. Specifically, one whose life is ruled and dictated by dependency needs suffers from a psychiatric disorder to which we ascribe the diagnostic name 'passive dependent personality disorder'. It is perhaps the most common of all psychiatric disorders.

People with this disorder, passive dependent people, are so busy seeking to be loved that they have no energy left to love. They are like starving people, scrounging, wherever they can for food, and with no food of their own to give to others. It is as if within them they have an inner emptiness, a bottomless pit crying out to be filled but which can never be completely filled. They never feel 'full-filled' or have a sense of completeness. They always feel 'a part of me is missing'. They tolerate loneliness very poorly. Because of their lack of wholeness they have no real sense of identity, and they define themselves solely by their relationships. A thirty-year-old punch press operator, extremely depressed, came to see me three days after his wife had left him, taking their two children. She had threatened to leave him three times before, complaining of his total lack of attention to her and the children. Each time he had pleaded with her to remain and had promised to change, but his change had never lasted more than a day, and this time she had carried out her threat. He had not slept for two nights, was trembling with anxiety, had tears streaming down his face and was seriously contemplating suicide. 'I can't live without my family,' he said, weeping, 'I love them so.'

'I'm puzzled,' I said to him. 'You've told me that your wife's complaints were valid, that you never did anything for her, that you came home only when you pleased, that you weren't interested in her sexually or emotionally, that you wouldn't even talk to the children for months on end, that you never played with them or took them anywhere. You have no relationship with any of your family, so I don't understand why you're so depressed over the loss of a relationship that never existed.'

'Don't you see?' he replied. 'I'm nothing now. Nothing. I have no wife. I have no children. I don't know who I am. I may not care for them, but I must love them. I am nothing without them.'

Because he was so seriously depressed—having lost the identity that his family gave him—I made an appointment to see him again two days later. I expected little improvement. But when he returned he bounded into the office grinning cheerfully and announced, 'Everything's OK now.'

'Did you get back together with your family?' I asked.

'Oh, no,' he replied happily, 'I haven't heard from them since I saw you. But I did meet a girl last night down at my bar. She said she really likes me. She's separated, just like me. We've got a date again tonight. I feel like I'm human once more. I guess I don't have to see you again.'

This rapid changeability is characteristic of passive dependent individuals. It is as if it does not matter whom they are dependent upon as long as there is just someone. It does not matter what their identity is as long as there is someone to give it to them. Consequently their relationships, although seemingly dramatic in their intensity, are actually extremely shallow. Because of the strength of their sense of inner emptiness and the hunger to fill it, passive dependent people will brook no delay in gratifying their need for others. A beautiful, brilliant and in some ways very healthy young woman had, from the age of seventeen to twenty-one, an almost endless series of sexual relationships with men invariably beneath her in terms of intelligence and capability. She went from one loser to the next. The problem as it emerged was that she was unable to wait long enough to seek out a man suited to her or even to choose from among the many men almost immediately available to her. Within twenty-four hours after the ending of a relationship she would pick up the first man she met in a bar and would come into her next therapy session singing his praises. 'I know he's unemployed and drinks too much, but basically he's very talented, and he really cares for me. I know this relationship will work.'

But it never did work, not only because she had not chosen well but also because she would then begin a pattern of clinging to the man, demanding more and more evidence of his affection, seeking to be with him constantly, refusing to be left alone. 'It is because I love you so much that I cannot bear to be separated from you,' she would tell him, but sooner or later he would feel totally stifled and trapped, without room to love, by her 'love'. A violent blow-up would occur, the relationship would be terminated and the cycle would begin all over again the next day. The woman was able to break the cycle only after three years of therapy, during which she came to appreciate her own intelligence and assets, to identify her emptiness and hunger and distinguish it from genuine love, to realize how her hunger was driving her to initiate and cling to relationships that were detrimental to her, and to accept the necessity for the strictest kind of discipline over her hunger if she was to capitalize on her assets.

In the diagnosis the word 'passive' is used in conjunction with the word 'dependent' because these individuals concern themselves with what others can do for them to the exclusion of what they themselves can do. Once, working with a group of five single patients, all passive dependent people, I asked them to speak of their goals in terms of what life situations they wanted to find themselves in five years hence. In one way or another each of them replied, 'I want to be married to someone who really cares for me.' Not one mentioned holding down a challenging job, creating a work of art, making a contribution to the community, being in a position where he or she could love or even have children. The notion of effort was not involved in their daydreams; they envisioned only an effortless passive state of receiving care. I told them, as I tell many others: 'If being loved is your goal, you will fail to achieve it. The only way to be assured of being loved is to be a person worthy of love, and you cannot be a person worthy of love when your primary goal in life is to passively be loved.' This is not to say that passive dependent people never *do* things for others, but their motive in doing things is to cement the attachment of the others to them so as to assure their own care. And when the possibility of care from another is not directly involved, they do have great difficulty in 'doing things'. All the members of the aforementioned group found it agonizingly difficult to buy a house, separate from their parents, locate a job, leave a totally unsatisfactory old job or even invest themselves in a hobby.

In marriage there is normally a differentiation of the roles of the two spouses, a normally efficient division of labor between them. The woman usually does the cooking, house-cleaning and shopping and cares for the children; the man usually maintains employment, handles the finances, mows the lawn and makes repairs. Healthy couples instinctively will switch roles from time to time. The man

may cook a meal now and then, spend one day a week with the children, clean the house to surprise the wife; the woman may get a part-time job, mow the lawn on her husband's birthday, or take over the checking account and bill-paying for a year. The couple may often think of this role switching as a kind of play that adds spice and variety to their marriage. It is this, but perhaps more important (even if it is done unconsciously), it is a process that diminishes their mutual dependency. In a sense, each spouse is training himself or herself for survival in the event of the loss of the other. But for passive dependent people the loss of the other is such a frightening prospect that they cannot face preparing for it or tolerating a process that would diminish the dependency or increase the freedom of the other. Consequently it is one of the behavioral hallmarks of passive dependent people in marriage that their role differentiation is rigid, and they seek to increase rather than diminish mutual dependency so as to make marriage more rather than less of a trap. By so doing, in the name of what they call love but what is really dependency, they diminish their own and each other's freedom and stature. Occasionally, as part of this process, passive dependent people when married will actually forsake skills that they had gained before marriage. An example of this is the not uncommon syndrome of the wife who 'can't' drive a car. Half the time in such situations she may never have learned, but in the remaining cases, sometimes allegedly because of a minor accident, she develops a 'phobia' about driving at some point after marriage and stops. The effect of this 'phobia' in rural and suburban areas, where most people live, is to render her almost totally dependent on her husband and chain her husband to her by her helplessness. Now he must do all the shopping for the family himself or he must chauffeur her on all shopping expeditions. Because this behavior usually gratifies the dependency needs of both spouses, it is almost never seen as sick or even as a problem to be solved by most couples. When I suggested to an otherwise extremely intelligent banker that his wife, who suddenly stopped driving at age forty-six because of a 'phobia', might have a problem deserving of psychiatric attention, he said 'Oh, no, the doctor told her it was because of menopause, and you can't do anything about that.' She was secure in the knowledge that he would not have an affair and leave her because he was so busy after work taking her shopping and driving the children around. He was secure in the knowledge that she would not have an affair and leave him because she did not have the mobility to meet people when he was away from her. Through such behavior, passive dependent marriages may be made lasting and secure, but they cannot be considered either healthy or genuinely loving, because the security is purchased at the price of freedom and the relationship serves to retard or destroy the growth of the individual partners. Again and again we tell our couples that "a good marriage can exist only between two strong and independent people."

Passive dependency has its genesis in lack of love. The inner feeling of emptiness from which passive dependent people suffer is the direct result of their parents' failure to fulfill their needs for affection, attention and care during their childhood. It was mentioned in the first section that children who are loved and cared for with relative consistency throughout childhood enter adulthood with a deep-seated feeling that they are loveable and valuable and therefore will be loved and cared for as long as they remain true to themselves. Children growing up in an atmosphere in which love and care are lacking or given with gross inconsistency enter childhood with no such sense of inner security. Rather, they have an inner sense of insecurity, a feeling of "I don't have enough" and a sense that the world is unpredictable and ungiving, as well as a sense of themselves as being questionably lovable and valuable. It is no wonder, then, that they feel the need to scramble for love, care and attention wherever they can find it, and once having found it, cling to it with a desperation that leads them to unloving, manipulative, Machiavellian behavior that destroys the very relationships they seek to preserve. As also indicated in the previous section, love and discipline go hand in hand, so that unloving, uncaring parents are people lacking in discipline, and when they fail to provide their children with a sense of being loved, they also fail to provide them with the capacity for self-discipline. Thus the excessive dependency of the passive dependent individuals is only the principal manifestation of their personality disorder. Passive dependent people lack self-discipline. They are unwilling or unable to delay gratification of their hunger for attention. In their desperation to form and preserve attachments they throw honesty to the winds. They cling to outworn relationships

when they should give them up. Most important, they lack a sense of responsibility for themselves. They passively look to others, frequently even their own children, as the source of their happiness and fulfillment, and therefore when they are not happy or fulfilled they basically feel that others are responsible. Consequently they are endlessly angry, because they endlessly feel let down by others who can never in reality fulfill all their needs or 'make' them happy. I have a colleague who often tells people, 'Look, allowing yourself to be dependent on another person is the worst possible thing you can do to yourself. You would be better off being dependent on heroin. As long as you have a supply of it, heroin will never let you down; if it's there, it will always make you happy. But if you expect another person to make you happy, you'll be endlessly disappointed.' As a matter of fact, it is no accident that the most common disturbance that passive dependent people manifest beyond their relationships to others is dependency on drugs and alcohol. Theirs is the 'addictive personality'. They are addicted to people, sucking on them and gobbling them up, and when people are not available to be sucked and gobbled, they often turn to the bottle or the needle or the pill as a people-substitute.

In summary, dependency may appear to be love because it is a force that causes people to fiercely attach themselves to one another. But in actuality it is not love; it is a form of anti-love. It has its genesis in a parental failure to love and it perpetuates the failure. It seeks to receive rather than to give. It nourishes infantilism rather than growth. It works to trap and constrict rather than to liberate. Ultimately it destroys rather than builds relationships, and it destroys rather than builds people.

Cathexis Without Love

One of the aspects of dependency is that it is unconcerned with spiritual growth. Dependent people are interested in their own nourishment, but no more; they desire to be happy; they don't desire to grow, nor are they willing to tolerate the unhappiness, the loneliness and suffering involved in growth. Neither do dependent people care about the spiritual growth of the other, the object of their dependency, they care only that the other is there to satisfy them. Dependency is but one of the forms of behavior to which we incorrectly apply the word 'love' when concern for spiritual evolution is absent. We will now consider other such forms, and we hope to demonstrate again that love is never nurturance or cathexis without regard to spiritual growth.

We frequently speak of people loving inanimate objects or activities. Thus we say, 'He loves money' or 'He loves power' or 'He loves to garden' or 'He loves to play golf'. Certainly an individual may extend himself or herself much beyond ordinary personal limits, working sixty, seventy, eighty hours a week to amass wealth or power. Yet despite the extent of one's fortune or influence, all this work and accumulation may not be self-enlarging at all. Indeed, we may often say about a self-made tycoon, 'He's a small person, mean and petty'. While we may talk about how much this person loves money or power, we frequently do not perceive him as a loving person. Why is this so? It is because wealth or power have become for such people ends in themselves rather than means to a spiritual goal. The only true end of love is spiritual growth or human evolution.

Hobbies are self-nurturing activities. In loving ourselves—that is, nurturing ourselves for the purpose of spiritual growth—we need to provide ourselves with all kinds of things that are not directly spiritual. To nourish the spirit the body must also be nourished. We need food and shelter. No matter how dedicated we are to spiritual development, we also need rest and relaxation, exercise and distraction. Saints must sleep and even prophets must play. Thus hobbies may be a means through which we love ourselves. But if a hobby becomes an end in itself, then it becomes a substitute for rather than a means to self-development. Sometimes it is precisely because they are substitutes for self-development that hobbies are so popular. On golf courses, for instance, one may

find some ageing men and women whose chief remaining goal in life is to knock a few more strokes off their game. This dedicated effort to improve their skill serves to give them a sense of progress in life and thereby assists them in ignoring the reality that they have actually stopped progressing, having given up the effort to improve themselves as human beings. If they loved themselves more they would not allow themselves to passionately settle for such a shallow goal and narrow future.

On the other hand, power and money may be means to a loving goal. A person may, for instance, suffer a career in politics for the primary purpose of utilizing political power for the betterment of the human race. Or some people may yearn for riches, not for money's sake but in order to send their children to college or provide themselves with the freedom and time for study and reflection which are necessary for their own spiritual growth. It is not power or money that such people love; it is humanity.

Among the things that I am saying here and throughout this section of the book is that our use of the word 'love' is so generalized and unspecific as to severely interfere with our understanding of love. I have no great expectation that the language will change in this respect. Yet as long as we continue to use the word 'love' to describe our relationship with anything that is important to us, anything we cathect, without regard for the quality of that relationship, we will continue to have difficulty discerning the difference between the wise and the foolish, the good and the bad, the noble and the ignoble.

Using our more specific definition, it is clear, for instance, that we can love only human beings. For, as we generally conceive of things, it is only human beings who possess a spirit capable of substantial growth. Consider the matter of pets. We 'love' the family dog. We feed it and bathe it, pet it and cuddle it, discipline it and play with it. When it is sick we may drop everything and rush it to the veterinarian. When it runs away or dies we may be grief-stricken. Indeed, for some lonely people without children, their pets may become the sole reason for their existence. If this is not love, then what is? But let us examine the differences between our relationship with a pet and that with another human being. First of all, the extent of our communication with our pets is extremely limited in comparison with the extent to which we may communicate with other humans if we work at it. We do not know what our pets are thinking. This lack of knowledge allows us to project onto our pets our own thoughts and feelings, and thereby to feel an emotional closeness with them which may not correspond to reality at all. Second, we find our pets satisfactory only insofar as their wills coincide with ours. This is the basis on which we generally select our pets, and if their wills begins to diverge significantly from our own, we get rid of them. We don't keep pets around very long when they protest or fight back against us. The only school to which we send our pets for the development of their minds or spirits is obedience school. Yet it is possible for us to desire that other humans develop a 'will of their own'; indeed, it is this desire for the differentiation of the other that is one of the characteristics of genuine love. Finally, in our relationship with pets we seek to foster their dependency. We do not want them to grow up and leave home. We want them to stay put, to lie dependably near the hearth. It is their attachment to us rather than their independence from us that we value in our pets.

This matter of the 'love' of pets is of immense importance because many, many people are capable of 'loving' *only* pets and incapable of genuinely loving other human beings. Large numbers of American soldiers had idyllic marriages to German, Italian, or Japanese 'war brides' with whom they could not verbally communicate. But when their brides learned English, the marriages began to fall apart. The servicemen could then no longer project upon their wives their own thoughts, feelings, desires and goals and feel the same sense of closeness one feels with a pet. Instead, as their wives learned English, the men began to realize that these women had ideas, opinions and aims different from their own. As this happened, love began to grow for some; for most, perhaps, it ceased. The liberated woman is right to beware of the man who affectionately calls her his "pet." He may indeed be an

individual whose affection is dependent upon her being a pet, who lacks the capacity to respect her strength, independence and individuality. Probably the most saddening example of this phenomenon is the very large number of women who are capable of "loving" their children only as infants. Such women can be found everywhere. They may be ideal mothers until their children reach the age of two—infinitely tender, joyously breast-feeding, cuddling and playing with their babies, consistently affectionate, totally dedicated to their nurture, and blissfully happy in their motherhood. Then, almost overnight, the picture changes. As soon as a child begins to assert its own will—to disobey, to whine, to refuse to play, to occasionally reject being cuddled, to attach itself to other people, to move out into the world a little bit on its own—the mother's love ceases. She loses interest in the child, decathects it, perceives it only as a nuisance. At the same time she will often feel an almost overpowering need to be pregnant again, to have another infant, another pet. Usually she will succeed, and the cycle is repeated. If not, she may be seen avidly seeking to baby-sit for the infant children of neighbors while almost totally ignoring the pleas of her own older child or children for attention. For her children the "terrible twos" are not only the end of their infancy, they are also the end of the experience of being loved by mother. The pain and deprivation they experience are obvious to all except their mother, busy with her new infant. The effect of this experience is usually evidenced as the children grow to adulthood in a depressive and/or passive dependent personality pattern.

What this suggests is that the "love" of infants and pets and even dependently obedient spouses is an instinctual pattern of behavior to which it is quite appropriate to apply the term "maternal instinct" or, more generally, "paternal instinct." We can liken this to the instinctual behavior of "falling in love": it is not a genuine form of love in that it is relatively effortless, and it is not totally an act of will or choice; it encourages the survival of the species but is not directed toward its improvement or spiritual growth; it is close to love in that it is a reaching out for others and serves to initiate interpersonal bonds from which real love might begin; but a good deal more is required to develop a healthy, creative marriage, raise a healthy, spiritually growing child or contribute to the evolution of humanity.

The point is that nurturing can be and usually should be much more than simple feeding, and that nurturing spiritual growth is an infinitely more complicated process than can be directed by any instinct. The mother mentioned at the beginning of this section who would not let her son take the bus to school is a case in point. By driving him to and from school she was nurturing him in a sense, but it was a nurturing he did not need and that clearly retarded rather than furthered his spiritual growth. Other examples abound: mothers who push food on their already overweight children; fathers who buy their sons whole roomfuls of toys and their daughters whole closetfuls of clothes; parents who set no limits and deny no desires. Love is not simply giving; it is *judicious* giving and judicious withholding as well. It is judicious praising and judicious criticizing. It is judicious arguing, struggling, confronting, urging, pushing and pulling in addition to comforting. It is leadership. The word "judicious" means requiring judgment, and judgment requires more than instinct; it requires thoughtful and often painful decision-making.

'Self-Sacrifice'

The motives behind injudicious giving and destructive nurturing are many, but such cases invariably have a basic feature in common: the "giver," under the guise of love, is responding to and meeting his or her own needs without regard to the spiritual needs of the receiver. A minister reluctantly came to see me because his wife was suffering from a chronic depression and both his sons had dropped out of college and were living at home and receiving psychiatric attention. Despite the fact that his whole family was "ill," he was initially completely unable to comprehend that he might be playing a role in their illness. "I do everything in my power to take care of them and their problems," he reported. "I

don't have a waking moment when I am not concerned about them." Analysis of the situation revealed that this man was indeed working himself to the bone to meet the demands of his wife and children. He had given both of his sons' new cars and paid the insurance on them even though he felt the boys should be putting more effort into being self-supporting. Each week he took his wife to the opera or the theater in the city even though he intensely disliked going to the city, and opera bored him to death. Busy though he was on his job, he spent most of his free time at home picking up after his wife and sons, who had a total disregard for house-cleaning. "Don't you get tired of laying yourself out for them all the time?" I asked him. "Of course," he replied, "but what else am I to do? I love them and I have too much compassion not to take care of them. My concern for them is so great that I will never allow myself to stand by as long as they have needs to be filled. I may not be a brilliant man, but at least I have love and concern."

Interestingly, it emerged that his own father had been a brilliant scholar of considerable renown, but also an alcoholic and philanderer who showed a total lack of concern for the family and was grossly neglected of them. Gradually my patient was helped to see that as a child he had vowed to be as different from his father as possible, to be as compassionate and concerned as his father was heartless and unconcerned. He was even able to understand after a while that he had a tremendous stake in maintaining an image of himself as loving and compassionate, and that much of his behavior, including his career in the ministry, had been devoted to fostering this image. What he did not understand so easily was the degree to which he was infantilizing his family. He continually referred to his wife as "my kitten" and to his full-grown, strapping sons as "my little ones." How else can I behave?" he pleaded. "I may be loving in reaction to my father, but that doesn't mean I'm going to become unloving or turn myself into a bastard." What he literally had to be taught was that loving is a complicated rather than a simple activity, requiring the participation of his entire being—his head as well as his heart. Because of his need to be as unlike his father as possible, he had not been able to develop a flexible response system for expressing his love. He had to learn that not giving at the right time was more compassionate than giving at the wrong time, and that fostering independence was more loving than taking care of people who could otherwise take care of themselves. He even had to learn that expressing his own needs, anger, resentments and expectation was every bit as necessary to the mental health of his family as his self-sacrifice, and therefore that love must be manifested in confrontation as much as in beatific acceptance.

Gradually coming to realize how he infantilized his family, he began to make changes. He stopped picking up after everyone and became openly angry when his sons did not adequately participate in the care of the home. He refused to continue paying for the insurance on his sons' cars, telling them that if they wanted to drive they would have to pay for it themselves. He suggested that his wife should go alone to the opera in New York. In making these changes he had to risk appearing to be the "bad guy" and had to give up the omnipotence of his former role as provider for all the needs of the family. But even though his previous behavior had been motivated primarily by a need to maintain an image of himself as a loving person, he had at his core a capacity for genuine love, and because of this capacity he was able to accomplish this alternation in himself. Both his wife and his sons reacted to these changes initially with anger. But soon one son went back to college, and the other found a more demanding job and got an apartment for himself. His wife began to enjoy her new independence and to grow in ways of her own. The man found himself becoming more effective as a minister and at the same time his life became more enjoyable.

The minister's misguided love bordered on the more serious perversion of love that is masochism. Laymen tend to associate sadism or masochism with purely sexual activity, thinking of them as the sexual enjoyment derived from inflicting or receiving physical pain. Actually, true sexual sadomasochism is a relatively uncommon form of psychopathology. Much, much more common, and ultimately more serious, is the phenomenon of social sadomasochism, in which people unconsciously desire to hurt and be hurt by each other through their nonsexual interpersonal relations.

Prototypically a woman will seek psychiatric attention for depression in response to desertion by her husband. She will regale the psychiatrist with an endless tale of repeated mistreatment by her husband: he paid her no attention, he had a string of mistresses, he gambled away the food money, he went away for days at a time whenever he pleased, he came home drunk and beat her and now, finally, he's deserted her and the children on Christmas Eve—Christmas Eve yet! The neophyte therapist tends to respond to this "poor woman" and her tale with instant sympathy, but it does not take long for the sympathy to evaporate in the light of further knowledge. First the therapist discovers that this pattern of mistreatment has existed for twenty years, and that while the poor woman divorced her brute of a husband twice, she also remarried him twice, and that innumerable separations were followed by innumerable reconciliations. Next, after working with her for a month or two to assist her in gaining independence, and when everything seemingly is going well and the woman appears to be enjoying the tranquility of life apart from her husband, the therapist sees the cycle enacted all over again. The woman happily bounces into the office one day to announce, "Well, Henry's come back. He called up the other night saying he wanted to see me, so I did see him. He pleaded with me to come back, and he really seems changed, so I took him back." When the therapist points out that this seems to be but a repetition of a pattern they had agreed was destructive, the woman says, "But I love him. You can't deny love." If the therapist attempts to examine this "love" with any strenuousness, then the patient terminates therapy.

What is going on here? In trying to understand what has happened, the therapist recalls the obvious relish with which the woman had recounted the long history of her husband's brutality and mistreatment. Suddenly a strange idea begins to dawn: maybe this woman endures hers husband's mistreatment, and even seeks it out, for the very pleasure of talking about it. But what would be the nature of such pleasure? The therapist remembers the woman's self-righteousness. Could it be that the most important thing in the woman's life is to have a sense of moral superiority and that in order to maintain this sense she needs to be mistreated? The nature of the pattern now becomes clear. By allowing herself to be treated basely she can feel superior. Ultimately she can even have the sadistic pleasure of seeing her husband beg and plead to return, and momentarily acknowledge her superiority from his humbled position, while she decides whether or not to magnanimously take him back. And in this moment she achieves her revenge. When such women are examined it is generally found that they were particularly humiliated as children. As a result they seek revenge through their sense of moral superiority, which requires repeated humiliation and mistreatment. If the world is treating us well we have no need to avenge ourselves on it. If seeking revenge is our goal in life, we will have to see to it that the world treats us badly in order to justify our goal. Masochists look on their submission to mistreatment as love, whereas in fact it is a necessity in their never-ceasing search for revenge and is basically motivated by hatred.

The issue of masochism highlights still another very major misconception about love—that it is self-sacrifice. By virtue of this belief the prototypical masochist was enabled to see her tolerance of mistreatment as self-sacrifice and hence love, and therefore did not have to acknowledge her hatred. The minister also saw his self-sacrificial behavior as love, although actually it was motivated not by the needs of his family but by his own need to maintain an image of himself. Early in his treatment he would continually talk about how he "did things for" his wife and his children, leading one to believe that he himself got nothing out of such acts. But he did. Whenever we think of ourselves as doing something, *for* someone else, we are in some way denying our own responsibility. Whatever we do is done because we choose to do it, and we make that choice because it is the one that satisfies us the most. Whatever we do for someone else we do because it fulfills a need we have. Parents who say to their children: "You should be grateful for all that we have done for you" are invariably parents who are lacking in love to a significant degree. Anyone who genuinely loves knows the pleasure of loving. When we genuinely love we do so because we want to love. We have children because we want to have children, and if we are loving parents, it is because we want to be loving parents. It is true that love involves a change in the self, but this is an extension of the self rather than a sacrifice of the self.

As will be discussed again later, genuine love is a self-replenishing activity. Indeed, it is even more; it enlarges rather than diminishes the self; it fills the self rather than depleting it. In a real sense love is as selfish as nonlove. Here again there is a paradox in that love is both selfish and unselfish at the same time. It is not selfishness or unselfishness that distinguishes love from nonlove; it is the aim of the action. In the case of genuine love the aim is always spiritual growth. In the case of nonlove the aim is always something else.

Love is Not a Feeling

I have said that love is an action, an activity. This leads to the final major misconception of love which needs to be addressed. Love is not a feeling. Many, many people possessing a feeling of love and even acting in response to that feeling act in all manner of unloving and destructive ways. On the other hand, a genuinely loving individual will often take loving and constructive action toward a person he or she consciously dislikes, actually feeling no love toward the person at the time and perhaps even finding the person repugnant in some way.

The feeling of love is the emotion that accompanies the experience of cathecting. Cathecting, it will be remembered, is the process by which an object becomes important to us. Once cathected, the object, commonly referred to as a "love object," is invested with our energy as if it were a part of ourselves, and this relationship between us and the invested object is called a cathexis. Since we may have many such relationships going on at the same time, we speak of our cathexes. The process of withdrawing our energy from a love object so that it loses its sense of importance for us is known as decathecting. The misconception that love is a feeling exists because we confuse cathecting with loving. This confusion is understandable since they are similar processes, but there are also striking differences. First of all, as has been pointed out, we may cathect any object, animate or inanimate, with or without a spirit. Thus a person may cathect the stock market or a piece of jewelry and may feel love for these things. Second, the fact that we have cathected another human being does not mean that we care a whit for that person's spiritual development. The dependent person, in fact, usually fears the spiritual development of a cathected spouse. The mother who insisted upon driving her adolescent son to and from school clearly cathected the boy; he was important to her—but his spiritual growth was not. Third, the intensity of our cathexes frequently has nothing to do with wisdom or commitment. Two strangers may meet in a bar and cathect each other in such a way that nothing—not previously scheduled appointments, promises made, or family stability—is more important for the moment than their sexual consummation. Finally, our cathexes may be fleeting and momentary. Immediately following their sexual consummation the just-mentioned couple may find each other unattractive and undesirable. We may decathect something almost as soon as we have cathected it.

Genuine love, on the other hand, implies commitment and the exercise of wisdom. When we are concerned for someone's spiritual growth, we know that a lack of commitment is likely to be harmful and that commitment to the person is probably necessary for us to manifest our concern effectively. It is for this reason that commitment is the cornerstone of the psychotherapeutic relationship. It is almost impossible for a patient to experience significant personality growth without a "therapeutic alliance" with the therapist. In other words, before the patient can risk major change he or she must feel the strength and security that come from believing that the therapist is the patient's constant and stable ally. For this alliance to occur the therapist must demonstrate to the patient, usually over a considerable length of time, the consistent and steadfast caring that can arise only from a capacity for commitment. This does not mean that the therapist always *feels* like listening to the patient. Commitment means that the therapist listens to the patient, like it or not. It is no different in a marriage. In a constructive marriage, just as in constructive therapy, the partners must regularly, routinely and predictably, attend to each other and their relationship no matter how they feel. As has

been mentioned, couples sooner or later always fall out of love, and it is at the moment when the mating instinct has run its course that the opportunity for genuine love begins. It is when the spouses no longer feel like being in each other's company always, when they would rather be elsewhere some of the time, that their love begins to be tested and will be found to be present or absent.

This is not to say that the partners in a stable, constructive relationship such as intensive psychotherapy or marriage do not cathect each other and the relationship itself in various ways; they do. What it does say is that genuine love transcends the matter of cathexes. When love exists it does so with or without cathexis and with or without a loving feeling. It is easier—indeed, it is fun—to love with cathexis and the feeling of love. But it is impossible to love without cathexis and without loving feelings, and it is in the fulfillment of this possibility that genuine and transcended love is distinguished from simple cathexis. The key word in this distinction is "will." I have defined love as the *will* to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth. Genuine love is volitional rather then emotional. The person who truly loves does so because of a decision to love. This person has made a commitment to be loving whether or not the loving feeling is present. If it is, so much the better; but if it isn't, the commitment to love, the will to love, still stands and is still exercised. Conversely, it is not only possible but necessary for a loving person to avoid acting on feelings of love. I may meet a woman who strongly attracts me, whom I feel like loving, but because it would be destructive to my marriage to have an affair at that time, I will say vocally or in the silence of my heart, "I feel like loving you, but I am not going to." Similarly, I may refuse to take on a new patient who is most attractive and likely to succeed in therapy because my time is already committed to other patients, some of whom may be considerably less attractive and more difficult. My feelings of love may be unbounded, but my capacity to be loving is limited. I therefore must choose the person on whom to focus my capacity to love, toward whom to direct my will to love. True love is not a feeling by which we are overwhelmed. It is a committed, thoughtful decision.

The common tendency to confuse love with the feeling of love allows people all manner of self-deception. An alcoholic man, whose wife and children are desperately in need of his attention at that very moment, may be sitting in a bar with tears in his eyes, telling the bartender, "I really love my family." People who neglect their children in the grossest of ways more often than not will consider themselves the most loving of parents. It is clear that there may be a self-serving quality in this tendency to confuse love with the feeling of love; it is easy not at all unpleasant to find evidence of love in one's feelings. It may be difficult and painful to search for evidence of love in one's actions. But because true love is an act of will that often transcends ephemeral feelings of love or cathexis, it is correct to say, "Love is as love does." Love and nonlove, as good and evil, are objective and not purely subjective phenomena.

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Source: M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* (London: Arrow, 1990), 85-127.