

## **Free love**

Notice how easy it is for us to speak with someone whom we really love, and who loves us back. This would not always work when we expect some kind of “returns” from our loving. Then, we are not really giving or showing love, but trying to purchase the love of another.

People change, and they change all the time. We simply do not notice this, or choose not to notice it. However, we can and must catch up with people – especially those whom we love – by seeing them as “moments” of love, as opportunities for giving love, to show our love to them.

What do we say to someone we love? This question is better acted on than answered. We can give all the answers, but they are unlikely to touch the one we love. For, the true words of love come from the heart, not the head or the mouth. So, it is about feeling, not thinking. To think is to look at objects, at things, at people, and to comment on them. Such comments do not really relate to us directly.

To speak from the heart is to feel the other person, to listen and see with our heart. One easy way to understand this is to imagine what it would be like if there were no space at all between us: between the loving and the loved. Even better, in the true spirit of early Buddhism, we would say that there is neither lover nor one loved. There is only loving.

When we remove or close up the space between “I” and “other,” then, there is just “we.” We begin to feel what loving really *is*. The point is that we can never really know what others, even our truly beloved, really is. Sometimes, we think we can read another really well, but in time, we find that we were badly mistaken.

Or, that the other person was just playing along. People, especially those whom we like or love, tend to behave in the way that we see them, or expect of them. See how parents who are really close to their children think that they know everything about them. That is, until the children are given the opportunity to be themselves with others they really like or love. Then, we see them truly happy – they are really their true selves. Then, their parents would, with some surprise at least, say that they have never seen that “part” of their children.

Parents who claim to “know” their children are simply saying that they see them the way they want them to be. The reality is that they have turned their beloved children into “Peter Pan”: they never grow up, always “my little boy or little girl.” Sadly, such children are likely to be emotionally stunted all their lives. They are only living in the past that their parents had created for them.

They may be successful in every other way, academically, financially, socially, powerfully, even religiously. But they have never really learned to love. That is, unless they break out of the Peter Pan cocoon; let their emotional wings dry and strengthen so that they can fly on their own in the space of love and change.

There is love that holds, there is love that frees. Parental love may only hold the child for the first seven years or so – that’s when they really need the warm closeness of parents. Our parents give us our human bodies at birth, but these precious years of love give us our humanity.

Then, we have to learn to socialize in the following years. These are further formative years when we must love, look and learn. This is our opportunity to grow like seedlings from seeds flung far from the parent tree’s shadow. This is the time to make friends, make mistakes, learn

from them and make amends. Let there be neither “first love” nor “last love” – let there be only loving. To love is to learn.

If, as parents, we see our children only as our own image, who worship us, who only believe in us, then, they are but creatures of our creation. They have been deprived of the space to be the best they can be. They will never be able to discover themselves, much less *be* themselves.

In other words, we see our children merely as objects that we have brought into the world (so they “owe” us, as it were): we “have” them. The poet Kahlil Gibran, in his “The Prophet” (1923)<sup>1</sup> sings:

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.  
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.  
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*

What we say, how we say it, to our children will make or break them in time. We may not see the cracks on them, because they are *in* our children’s hearts. If we only teach religion to our children, they will be religious, but not spiritual. If we teach our children only to know and have things, they may not know how to feel or enjoy themselves. If we only teach them to fear God, they will grow in fear; they will never learn to love. If we teach them only not to sin, they will soon see this as a way to get back at us. We can only show them love to teach them love.

There is only one way to teach our children; there is only one way we can talk with those whom we love. It must be the language of love. The language of love has four arms: two are ours, two are those of our beloved. We stretch our two arms to embrace our beloved with the left hand of unconditional love and the right hand of compassion, loving them even when, especially when, they do not deserve it. The left hand is nearer the heart, the right is the giving hand.

We can try to guide or force the arms of another around us, but they would not hold. We can only rejoice in gladness in our beloved, being joyful in what makes them joyful. Then, we feel their hands touching us warmly. To appreciate the being of another, we must not only be happy at their happiness, but also accept their failures and sufferings just as they are. We may not be able to change people, but we can do something better: we never give up on them. To truly love someone is to never give up on them, when it seems to be the hardest thing to do. They will then stretch forth their arms to us.

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<sup>1</sup> See Kahlil Gibran, “[On children.](#)”