

## Looking for love

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Last week, an erstwhile musical child prodigy, now a Buddhist teenager, said to me something beautifully meaningful: “If not for the suffering we go through, we would not appreciate the Buddha’s teaching.” Often enough, the very first “source” of our suffering is our own family. We may have abusive parents, and we wished we were never born.

This reflection is on why the “source” is within quote marks.

Or, we simply do not get along with our parents or with a parent; there are the conditions for hate and anger to arise; but “we do not really know why.” As we mature, we thought we understand why we disliked them, or could not get along with or be close to certain people. Conflicts often make us desperate enough to seek solace from anywhere except where our love should truly be.

This reflection tries to help us clarify **why** “we do not really know why” we have these issues.

Basically, we have never learned to love because we had never been taught how to love, or because there was no love in our family in the first place. So we keep seeking love, acceptance and approval from some other or outer source of solace and succour. Often this is in figure of a perceptibly all-loving, apparently available, seemingly affable monk or nun or guru figure who seems to make sense of our life or who makes us forget what we are while we are at it.

I’m not using any psychological term here this time. Often, when we know a **term**, we think we know the problem or worse. We may even feel upset with this self-watching: we think we know ourselves; we even think we are all right. But then, why the pain and lack? Or worse, we simply **deny** it: what pain, what lack?

Often, we would create a virtual reality (like Pokemon Go) of what we want—security, acceptance, approval, even love—and seek it in a **virtual figure** of all the good things we are not or have not. In a sense, this is like falling in love with our own **shadow**. If Narcissus fell in love with his own image in the water (or mirror), we are like Peter Pan who has lost his shadow.

Peter Pan is the “boy who wouldn’t grow up.” In a way, the shadow represents our past that we feel we need, that we felt we never had, yet we fear or hate it: it’s dark and empty. Yet, not confronting the shadow, we will never grow up; we will never see the light of adulthood. We try looking for our shadow in authority figures: teachers, monks, nuns, some kind of power figure, even cult gurus or healers.

It is common knowledge, an urban quip, that when we have lost our shadow, we turn to **psychology**, even take it up as a profession. Perhaps, we will find some solution there or have some control over ourselves. We become a steely “super-sweet” man of the mind, but deep inside, we are still volcano seething with anger, hate and violence.

What better way of solving our problems than being grounded in the study of the mind and how to heal it. But as our understanding of psychology grows, we learn that the masters of psychology themselves were people with serious personal problems. We learn a lot about healing others, which is profitable, too, but we have yet to heal ourself. We seem to be able to relate to others only “psychologically,” but rarely, if ever, as between two warm-blooded feeling humans reflecting love between us.

I don't mean that all psychologists (etc) are nuts: I know a number who are humanly kind and wise. How many of us humans are not mad with lust, hate or delusion, at some time?

Here comes Buddhism, or more exactly, **Buddhist psychology**. This is a game changer. Now we have a better idea that there is **no one** to blame but **conditions**. Many causal conditions work together to produce numerous effects.

Through Buddhism, we also learn that nothing is forever: all things change, become other. We can and must decide **how** we are to change. We are taught **love** in the form of loving-kindness or unconditional acceptance. We are taught how we should let go of even the most vital part of what we are: the **breath**. We breathe in, but we must breathe out. What we take in, we must give back.

That's the way to go; that's the way to grow. Let it come, let it go.

When we learn to love,  
to accept unconditionally those we think we have hurt,  
or whom we think have hurt us;  
or those we inexplicably dislike, or who we perceive as disliking us;  
when we accept ourself just as we are—  
we discover a great space and boundless light within our being that is bigger than the universe itself.

We must simply keep on reaching out to others so that they realize we really care for them.

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