

Live to love

What if we feel that we are rejected by others, especially people we love or care for, by those we like or wish to be close to? We feel a growing distance even from loved ones in our own family, or the same class or school, or work-place, or community, or religion, or society, or country.

We could feel rejected for a number of reasons. Others might perceive us as lacking looks, or lacking wealth, or lacking power, or lacking class, or as being different. Some of us might try to feel accepted by others by flaunting what we have, or overdress ourselves, or hobnob with the right big people, or be a yesman to those we look up to. Yet, somehow, we still feel lonely and apart from these others.

Perhaps, that's why we have to keep running after them, tacitly or openly hoping for positive strokes from them. Or, if we think we command power, wealth, or charm, we could "buy" anyone we want or make anyone do anything we want. We then make good preachers, better politicians, but very poor practitioners.

The Dharma has much to teach us about accepting ourselves as we are, and discover our potential for great goodness and good greatness. For the young and those young at heart, even something mundane like a good movie, or the good in a movie, can open a Dharma window in our lives.

Vital human issues highlighted in *Pretty in Pink*, a 1986 US teen romantic comedy-drama and cult favourite. Working-class girl, Andie Walsh (Molly Ringwald), is a high school senior who works at a new wave music store. Her underemployed father, Jack (Harry Dean Stanton), could neither get a job nor get over the loss of an unloving wife who left them while Andie was very young.

Andie feels the pain of the loss, too, but does not allow it to hurt or deprive her. Not only is she pretty and intelligent, but she effectively runs the house and is creative with her clothes, too. Through her positively strong and bubbly personality, she is able to help her father get out of his melancholy to live more happily.

Andie is deeply loved by the hilariously doting Duckie (Jon Cryer), who would cycle by her house a few times everyday. They are childhood friends, and Andie does love him, but only as a friend. But Duckie loves her to the end (of the show) and, shows his true love by actually letting her choose her own love.

Rich but good kid Blane (Andrew McCarthy) and Andie are naturally attracted to one another and fall in love. Blane invites her to the school prom (a formal ball held for a school class towards the end of the academic year), and Andie happily accepts.

These "unequal" individuals – a rich boy and a poor girl – united only by love, face an uphill challenge. But mostly from other rich kids, especially Blane's arrogant preppy friend Steff (James Spader), who could have any girl or anything he wants. He keeps reminding Blane that his love for Andie would never work, as she is "different."

As a result, Blane himself becomes uncertain, and actually tells Andie that he "had invited someone else, and forgotten about it." *We would even lie to those who love us when we do not believe in ourself!* Andie, however, believing in their love, confronts him, challenging him to face the truth: that he is afraid of what his peers would think of him. In other words, Blane's desire for approval of his upper-class peers seems to be greater than his love for Andie. This confrontation is actually the turning-point in the story: it makes Blane think about himself, and his love.

As for Andie, she accepts this second loss (of Blane), but tells her father that she will still “go to the ball, be there and back,” so that she does not regret not going. This is the beauty of her emotional strength: *it is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all*. So she uses the materials from the pink dress her father has earlier presented to her, and another pink dress she received as a gift from her older friend and mentor Iona (Annie Potts), and makes herself a beautiful pink dress for the prom (which gives the movie its title).

On the prom day, she bravely by herself joins the prom. There she meets Duckie, who is delighted to see her, and they go into the dance-hall happily together. At another corner, Blane sits alone sipping a drink, quietly unsure of what to do.

Seeing Andie together with Duckie, Blane approaches them. As he passes by arrogant Steff, he again scornfully tells him not to waste his time with an underclass girl. This time Blane retorts by telling Steff off, that he thinks he can “buy” any girl he wants – except Andie. So he (Steff) is sore. Blane then walks off to see Andie and Duckie.

Blane magnanimously shakes Duckie’s hand and wishes Andie well, but declares that he still loves her and has made a mistake. He leaves the hall for his car, ready to leave.

At this poignant moment, it is Duckie who, seeing the reality of the situation, advises Andie that she has to run up to Blane now or lose him forever. She does just that: runs up to Blane, looks him in the eye, and they kiss passionately beside his car. Happy ending of story.

One of the interesting questions we might ask here is, “What if others don’t believe in us?” What if others look down on us, or reject us for any reason? It is our past conditionings, or perhaps some present exigency or local trend, that make us reject another. Perhaps we think that we do not really know each other, or that the other party is not of our “class.” If our society is money-minded, status-conscious, or competitive, we might even unconsciously feel some subtle aversion against befriending those from whom we have nothing to gain (so it seems), but more to lose. In short, we do not believe in ourself.

The greatest gift we can humanly give to another is to be a friend. This means we give as much of ourselves as we can, until we discover that there is something in us that we are unwilling or unable to give. In the case of Blane, he realizes that it is his own lack of faith in himself. He thinks that he needs his peers’ approval, so he hesitates to love Andie.

Duckie, on the other hand, despite appearing to be an overly demonstrative person, is willing to give all his love to Andie, by allowing her to love Blane. Almost immediately after that he himself finds his own true love when another pretty girl connects with him. In short, Duckie is the kind of person who is always loving, and who believes in himself and in others.

Jack, Andie’s father, suffers the continuous pain of harping upon the loss of his unloving wife. But when he learns to believe in himself, he is able to accept true reality, and can really and happily love Andie. In other words, **to love is to learn**.¹

A friendship without love is simply a meeting of bodies, even if the intentions and actions seem common, like a crowd in a shopping mall. Love makes the vital difference. This is when we accept others just as they are. For, we are no better than others if we are unable to love them. True love is a mirror that shows us just as we are. If we fall short, we see what we are short of, and fill our lives up with the courage to rise beyond that shortage.

Love and friendship is the mirror of our own fullness to others. This often comes with a subtle but moving sense of fulfillment. Just as we feel happy when we are generous, the joy we feel when we make someone else happy is immeasurable. This is called unconditional love.

¹ See Reflection, “To love is to learn,” R282 2013: [link](#).

Unconditional love also means that we are willing and able to believe in ourself. In the movie, Andie is the one who really believes in herself. In doing so, she pulls her chronically sad father into true happiness. She accepts Blane's love and teaches him to believe in himself, which means not measuring himself against others. Being honest with Duckie, she frees him from a giddy love, so that he finds his true love. All those whose lives Andie touches learn to believe in themselves.

We need to believe in ourself first and fully. Otherwise, we are caught in the prison of our past, merely measuring what is before us with the past, and never really living the moment. We have rejected our own self. Only in believing in ourself, we have the true courage to face others, and in doing so, we become an ever better and really true person.

R350 Simple Joys 252

Piya Tan ©2014